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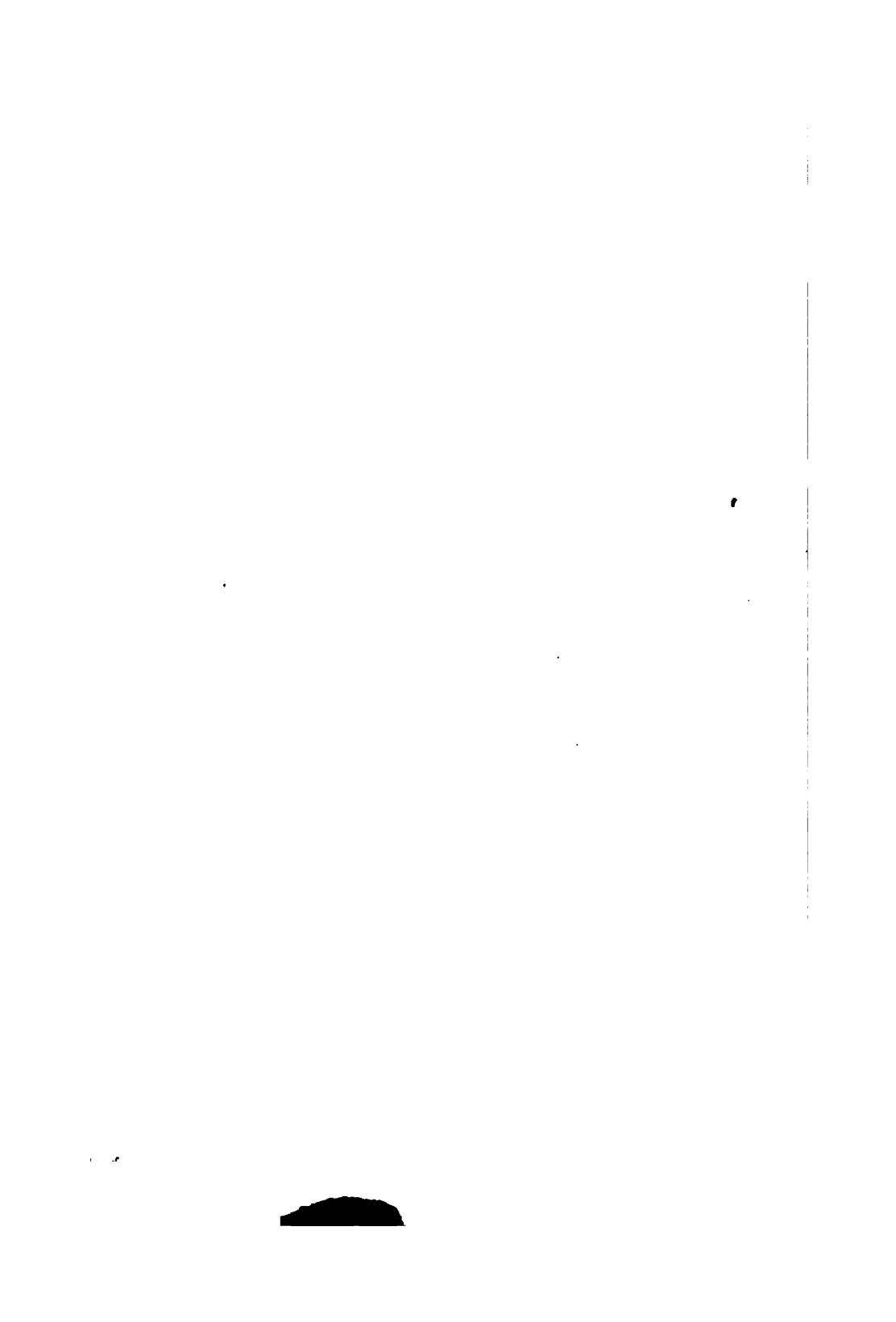


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HIGH CHURCH.

"Foppish airs
And histrionic mummary, that let down
The pulpit to the level of the stage."—COWPER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PART THE FIRST.

HIGH CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

TENCHESTER.

It was a large town. It was a quiet old town. It was a steady, matter-of-fact, business-like town, that throve well and turned a fair face to society. Nothing seemed to put the town out of its way, or change its mediæval character. When the railway came blundering through it, it was only a nine-days' wonder; large people in Tenchester did a little more business with London—one or two per cent of the population went thither more often; a few new ugly houses

rose near the railway ; the carcase of an hotel, grinning like a skeleton, was left by an unfortunate speculator, roofless and windowless, a hundred yards from the smart station—and that was all.

Tenchester jogged on in its usual fashion; and, save some commercial travellers bustling about the streets at times, and putting up at the "Lion," there were few new faces to trouble the townsfolk. For Tenchester did not encourage visitors, and looked disparagingly at strangers. There was nothing picturesque about Tenchester to attract artists, it was said—albeit the writer of this story might have proved the contrary to any Knight of the Palette and Canvas willing to be convinced. There were no historical reminiscences associated with the town; there had never been a battle fought there—Rupert's Cavaliers and Cromwell's Ironsides had not riddled a single house with shot; and the most hopeful antiquary would have

gone off by the next train at the sight of such a mass of uninteresting, lap-over houses, which a couple of hundred years, in most cases, had not even rendered attractive.

It was a large town, I have remarked—nothing more could be said for it. There were two churches in it, a Wesleyan chapel, and a little meeting-house for that strange little sect which gentlemen who write encyclopædias of religion politely ignore—the Plymouth brethren. There were some factories marring the landscape on the outskirts of Tenchester, and a hideous coal-mine or two four miles away. So much for Tenchester.

But the Tenchester people? Well, there was more animation about them than the houses, and more beauty in some of their fair daughters than in the views lying beyond. Perhaps the elders of Tenchester were rather more sober-paced than their contemporaries of adjacent towns, wore

habiliments of an age a little further remote, carried larger silver watches in their fobs—watches one could hear ticking half across the street—and displayed heavier bunches of seals and gold watch-keys upon more capacious stomachs. Yet, take them for all in all, they were not unlike the rest of the world—they had their entrances and exits, playing many parts; they were young and old, fair and ill-favoured—they had their trials and temptations, struggles with the strange world round them, and with the stranger world within themselves, which only that queer thing the heart knew anything about. Of a story of much trial and temptation in the world, and of that other busy world within ourselves; of ignorance striving to do good, and of good marred by vain obduracy, working much of evil, I sit me down to write.

What if I write with a purpose—having a desire to teach a moral, without parading

that moral too much before those dear insatiable novel-readers, who hate "the application"? What if I desire in these pages to weave amidst my story some little lesson to many whose fortunes resemble here and there those of the puppets waiting behind this curtain? If I do not weary you, dear reader, you will forgive me preaching now and then, be it only for the novelty of the thing. Writers now-a-days can only have their say in works of fiction—let us publish "tracts for the times," or shoot at Popish folly as it flies, and our readers are *not* legion.

So much for the Tenchester people in general—now for a few in particular, culled from the mass, and offered as specimens of human life, or human weakness—which? I shall have to speak of the Clergy; of a lady of aristocratic connections, and her handsome daughter; of Chester, Grimley & Chester, one of the largest firms in Tenchester; of

Ada Chester, the young wife of the senior member of the firm; of a few friends not quite so high in the scale of society, and—yes, it must be, O reader of fine notions and fashionable novels!—of two of the lowest vagabonds that ever this sun shone on, or a respectable town like Tenchester turned up its eyes at.

Of Martin Chester and his wife, Ada, let us speak in this place. The other ladies and gentlemen of this little tragi-comedy will make their bows in due course, and be politely introduced.

Martin Chester had been married to the pretty heiress, Ada Hartley, four months since; he took her from the home of a cross old uncle, and bore her away to spend a long honeymoon with him on the Continent. In every respect it was a love-match, as well as “a good match;” so both the romantic and the practical were satisfied. Martin Chester was a rich man, and though he had

not sought riches in his search for a wife, yet riches had come without seeking, and he had no particular objection to increasing the balance at his bankers. Let us sketch him sitting there in the recess of a bow-window, beneath which moved the gay world of Paris—a world to which he was turning a deaf ear in his eagerness to learn all the home news from the letter he held in his white, well-shaped hands.

A tall young man of some thirty years of age, with keen hazel eyes, and a brow above them that told of much thought, much worldly calculation, perhaps, and yet did not give a look of heaviness to the countenance. It was a true English face; there was something of the thorough-bred in the straight nose and the well-cut upper lip—take that face for all in all, there was no mistaking the honest, manly, energetic spirit that gave it light and life. As he read on, a second figure glided into the room, took its place beside

him, and, leaning two little jewelled hands upon his shoulder, asked "If the news were strictly private and confidential?"

"Is anything private and confidential from my pry of a wife?" asked the husband, looking up with all a young husband's fondness into the deep blue eyes.

"Is it from your brother Frank?"

"Yes, Ada—*your* brother, Frank, too, remember now."

"To be sure."

"You will love him very much?"

"Is he not my husband's brother?" said she; "and is not all that is dear to Martin Chester trebly dear to me?"

"My own Ada!"

Ah! forgive them, reader—they have only seen four months of wedded life, and they must be an ill-assorted couple, indeed, if the hard words and the skirmishes with the fire-irons set in earlier than that.

The wife, retaining her position, stood at

the husband's side, and read the letter with him. A fair-haired wife, of slight but graceful figure, and with a face that there was every excuse for Martin Chester falling in love with, and thinking he should like all to himself—for mankind is prone to selfishness. A face one does not see every day—a bright speaking face, that told of happiness and love—that we gaze at sometimes in a picture, by a master hand, that flashes by us at times in a crowd and then is lost to us for ever. Those faces in the crowd—"faces," as Longfellow says, "that have a story to tell"—must have puzzled most of us in our time; we come across them suddenly at a ball, at the opera, at church, in the street—faces that interest us at once, and appeal to some strange hidden sympathy, touching the chords of our heart, as though we had seen and known them in some far-off life, and the invisible, electric attraction of that time draws our thoughts towards them.

Husband and wife read the letter together.

“Tenchester, May 20, 18—.

“MY DEAR MARTIN,

“When is the extinguisher to be clapped on this long burning moon of yours, and your amiable brother to have the pleasure of seeing that extremely plain phiz of yours?—the pleasure of welcoming the pretty sister you so suddenly made for me? Only to see her at the altar, and for the few moments before the post-chaise bore you from Tenchester, is not sufficient for a young man overflowing with the milk of human kindness, which is, unfortunately, curdling for want of sympathy. That was a sly match of yours, Martin, and I have hardly forgiven you for keeping the junior partner in the dark. No wonder, *mon frere*, you insisted upon ‘doing’ the London journey so regularly, and cutting me out of my legal share in Casinos, Cyder-Cellars, and Coal-holes, and the rest of the attractions in town.

“But joking apart, I shall be glad to see you at the books again, busy with dry goods, and attending punctually to orders—so will Mr. Grimley. I don’t wish to hurry you home, understand—for business progresses smoothly, and the world is not standing still because Martin Chester is married. Still, four months is a long pull at pleasure, and a young couple happy in each other might find their new villa on the Tenchester Road just bearable, with an impudent brother looking in now-and-then, and spoiling the cooing. You will find ‘a change has come o’er the spirit’ of Tenchester since your departure; even the grim hand has been busy amongst us, though I have not cared to shadow your rejoicing hitherto with news of a death. Mr. Edmonds, who joined your hands at the altar, and gave you his blessing, has been gathered to his fathers; and Tenchester parish church boasts a new incumbent, and a new curate, too—such a strapper!—such a muscular Chris-

tian, my boy ! The senior Mr. Stone light and cheerful name, is it not ?—is making, and intends to make, rare changes in our little church ; he has plenty of money, has a taste for decoration, and thinks the charity children ‘ a screechy lot,’ which, *entre nous*, there is not the slightest doubt concerning. Old Twiggs—shaky Twiggs as we used to call him when we were boys—has been cashiered, and a new organist reigns in his stead—a fashionable young man, with a moustache, who comes by the train every Saturday night, and struts up the High Street with a roll of music, as if Tenchester belonged to him. He and the Rev. John Stone have knocked up a respectable choir, however, and we have some decent singing for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Yet the oldest inhabitant shakes his head, and says it never was so before, and consequently it is not exactly the thing. I don’t see any harm myself in *that*. There are one or two little

innovations, which jar a little, however, on my sensitive nerves, and Tenchester is inclined to grumble and mutter discontent. Fancy Tenchester waking up, and scolding because it has been roused from its long sleep. Fancy High Church coming to Tenchester, altering the shape of our pews, painting and decorating after its own peculiar style the time-worn parish church of St. Jude's! We are trotting along smoothly, however—those who object to Mr. Stone's doctrine stop away, or go to St. Mark's-in-the-Fields. Mr. Stone has an easy churchwarden, and till the re-election comes we may look for fair weather. So much for the news of the town, and of our own particular business.

“Will you write and let me know when your villa is to be prepared for you? I have had the name painted in Roman capitals on the gate-posts—‘Turtle Dove Villa’ I have

christened it—I was sure you would like the name.

“Your affectionate brother,
“FRANK CHESTER.”

“P.S.—You will be surprised to hear that Lady Cheyne is suffering from a nervous attack.

“P.P.S.—Mr. Grimley has announced his intention of putting up for churchwarden next year. Firm, old, puritanical Grimley; William Prynne, in drab shorts, and with his ears *on*. ‘When Greek meets Greek,’ &c.”

Mrs. Chester looked at her husband with somewhat of a puzzled air. Martin Chester returned her glance, and laughed.

“I see you don’t understand your new brother Frank yet, Ada,” said he; “cannot comprehend how much is meant for jest, and how deep is the undercurrent of earnestness flowing beneath this light, rippling stream. He is the best of fellows.”

"But 'Turtle Dove Villa,' Martin?" said the alarmed young wife. "He has never painted 'Turtle Dove Villa' on the gate-posts?"

"I think not," responded Martin, dryly.

"And Lady Cheyne—why should you be surprised to hear of her nervous attack?"

"I can't tell. I should have been more surprised if she had been without one."

"And Mr. Stone——?"

"I will interpret no more, Ada," cried he, with another of his frank laughs, as he rose.

"I will refer you to the writer in a few days—unless you are still anxious for fresh scenes and foreign faces."

"Oh! no, no. You will be so glad to go home, and settle down again."

"And you, Ada?" he asked, anxiously.

"And I am tired of this wandering to and fro, and shall be glad to see England and my husband's home; but——"

"But?" repeated Martin.

"But will you be the same Martin to me

then?" she cried, passionately—"when the world has begun again, and the world's business is troubling your head and distracting your love? Now you are all mine, and to go home to England is perhaps to break the spell which keeps you near me."

"My warm-hearted, impulsive Ada," he said, drawing her to his side again; "you will never think of the world, and my duties therein—of the sobering down from romance and turning to the reality of business and money-making. Life cannot be one honeymoon; and if now and then I am away from your side—perhaps over the account-books, or in the warehouses, I shall be thinking of you."

"Well," with her little red lip pouting, "I suppose we must settle down. All people do. But——"

"*But* again!"

"But Tenchester *will* be dull, I am afraid."

"Frank talks of Tenchester waking up."

Of High Church establishing itself in our old-fashioned quarters, and of a choir at S. Jude's. Now, my dear, music-loving little saint, will not that please you?"

"I admire good music."

"And if the Reverend John Stone stop at good music, why Tenchester need not fear a revolution in its church. As for me, I would prefer things as they were—charity-children's screeching and all. Innovations require delicate management, and it must be the light touch of a skilful hand that can make its changes in religious worship acceptable to all worshippers. Better to let the well alone, Ada."

"I lived in a cathedral town before uncle took me to London," said Ada, "and have learned to love cathedral service. I must say, I shall not regret the arrival of Mr. Stone."

"Well, if I live to regret it, or to wish that Tractarianism had not struck root in Ten-

chester, you must not scold me, Ada. My father and mother were plain, simple folk, and loved a plain, simple service, which, by the way, Tenchester has enjoyed for too many years not to feel a twinge, like parting with a favourite leg or arm, at its sudden cessation. I fear more is meant in Frank's letter than he cares to explain, but a few days will throw a light on the subject. High Church or Low Church will not make me fall out with Mr. Stone. I am an easy mortal, and take things phlegmatically ; I sit idling on the bank while the turgid stream frets beneath me, and bears away all the straws of religious, political, and literary disputations, which trouble so many wiser—and weaker—heads than my own. Had I had a deeper religious feeling," he added, somewhat sadly, "I should have been in the Church myself—been a better man. It was my father's one ambitious dream ; and, like many a son before me, I went dead against his wishes, and struck out my own

path. Well, poor old gentleman, he never complained—better to turn from the work altogether and seek another pursuit, than follow the teaching of God's word with no heart in the work."

"And you might have been a minister of the Church of England, and preferred business, Martin?" said Ada.

"I felt I could not do my duty earnestly, and my conscience would not let me half do it."

"You are the best of men!" cried Ada, enthusiastically.

"Ah! the honeymoon has not waned, remember," replied Martin, "and you haven't found out what a firm, hard-hearted, unrelenting being I am."

"And I never shall, Martin dear."

"Here is the stalking-horse of High Church in the midst of us," said Martin, lightly; "and that new battle-cry has made more

enemies, worked more harm, than either you or I can dream of, Ada Chester."

"Men's evil passions, not the Church of Christ," said Ada, reproachfully.

"Yes, the evil passions of the No Church, the Low Church, and the High Church followers together—all fierce and persistent, and inclined not to relinquish one foot of vantage-ground. So the fight proceeds, and the High Court of Parliament—grand umpire of such fights as these—folds its arms, and goes to sleep."

"Why, Martin, you are getting quite excited."

"Yes, and I am of the earth, earthy—of the Parliament, Parliamentary. It is a delicate subject; it would require careful handling of the knife to cut away the moral cancer—and," with a shrug of his shoulders, "it is no particular business of mine."

And so Martin Chester dismissed the subject, put on his hat, and took his happy

young wife on a shopping excursion. Religion was no particular business of his ; he was happy—religious differences would never arise between him and *his* wife. Everybody had prophesied what a happy couple they would be !

CHAPTER II.

“NO CHURCH.”

THE Tenchester road, after proceeding for a mile in a very formal and level manner—in a very exasperating manner to admirers of landscape and lovers of curved lines—takes a bend, and dips gracefully amongst the trees, proceeding for another good mile through an unprofitable, but picturesque, part of the country. To this spot I would have taken the Knight of the Palette and Canvas, alluded to in the beginning of my story, and pointed out one or two scenes worthy of making into pictures for the next Academical “hanging.”

The very dilapidated cottage, standing all on one side in a waggish manner, amongst some scrubby land and brushwood, would have made a fair feature in a landscape; and had Richard Burles and his stalwart son, Samuel, familiarly known as "Iron Sam" about Tenchester, been shown in their usual positions—the father making baskets of willow and rushes, and the son taking his ease on the grass, with that disreputable felt hat of his cocked over one eye—a charm would have been added to the picture, that would have brought those cheering four letters, "SOLD," speedily to it.

Take a Thursday March morning, for instance, before the leaves were rustling on the trees, and only last year's ivy was trailing over the worn thatch that roofed the cottage. It was a frosty morning, and the stagnant pond to the left of the house, where the frogs croaked so delightfully in summer, refused to budge an inch to the blandishments of a

wintry-looking sun. Over the cottage, and the bare branches shooting up forkwise above it, stretched a peculiarly flecked sky, towards which the smoke of the one chimney gracefully curled; whilst beyond, in the west, loomed some banks of woolly cloud, threatening future snow. Some patches of the deep blue heaven lighted up the scene through an irregular avenue of trees to the right of the cottage; and, in strong relief against the sky, stood a tall, loose-limbed being, engaged, just at the period of which we write, in chopping at the lower branches of the trees, and stacking them into faggots, much to the edification of an awkward one-sided dog, who, not accustomed to see his master so industriously employed, sat with cocked-up ears, watching intently the performance. Perhaps the wintry picture would have been marred without Sam Burles, who presented a figure to be admired—like Murillo's beggar—at a distance. It was a fine stalwart figure,

which the absence of Sam's coat displayed; and one could but admire the well-turned olive throat, which the open collar of an indifferently clean shirt set off to advantage, and the long brawny brown arms—to be approved of when out of their reach, or when their owner was in an excellent temper, which, unfortunately for human weakness, was not often the case. There was gipsy blood in Sam Burles—the olive skin, the quick black eyes, the thin, slightly curved nose, even the tangled locks and long horse-hair curls, were the attributes of a nomadic, goose-stealing race.

There was one window to the cottage, and that window was open; and seated thereat, with the same indifference to climate, was the senior Burles, basket-making as usual. He was a man not quite so tall or swarthy as his son, but still what is termed an ugly customer. A ball-headed, bull-necked man, with a head of hair silently expressive of con-

tempt for combs and brushes, and a face possessed of as many strata of dirt as a geological map.

As the man at the open window sat and whistled over his work, looking out occasionally across the coarse grass, and the decaying pailings in front of the cottage, he became at last aware of a gentleman standing in the roadway watching either him, his house, or his hopeful son in the distance. Mr. Burles, who was not wholly deficient in politeness, rose upon recognizing the gentleman, and very coolly stepped through the window into an old beehive lying upside down beneath it, kicked the encumbrance on to the frozen pond, and walked, or rather shuffled, in two ancient slippers, towards the hingeless garden-gate.

“Good mornin’, sir,” pulling at a straggling lock of hair that hung in a Blueskin-like manner over his forehead.

“Good morning.”

"Taking sight of the old cottage, I see, Mr. Stone—not a place for gentlefolk, I reck'n, but a roof's a roof in these awfu' hard times."

"May I ask your name?—I have heard it once, but it has escaped my memory."

"Burles. It seems queer like that any one should ask my name within twenty mile of Tenchester. Burles it be, sir—and there's not a name better known in the parish, I'd lay sixpence."

"Is that young man your son?"

"Ay, ay—son it be. A wild 'un."

"I saw him in Tenchester Market yesterday, I think."

"Tenchester Market it wor—he be fond of the market. Brought up there a'most, along with the pump and the baskets."

"I have seen him some half-a-dozen times since my stay in Tenchester," said the gentleman, speaking very slowly and deliberately; "four' times out of the six, brawling or

blaspheming in the streets. That is a very awful thing to contemplate."

"He swears a little now and then," said the old man, carelessly; "most men do at his age when there's anything to cross 'em. I used to rap out myself when I wor young—but I growed better, sir. The way of the world it be."

"You are never at church, Mr. Burles?"

"*Mr.* Burles!—ho, ho!"

The clergyman repeated his question in the same quiet tones.

"Lor' bless you sir, never! The people don't care to see me without a Sunday suit, and Sunday suit it beant. Foine feathers mak' foine birds, and foine birds don't want such moulting cattle as oursells, sticking up in the free seats like a couple of scarecrows. Genteel people go to church—we are not genteel—we never wor."

"Do you not attend any place of worship, then?"

“When I’m in the humour, I turn in among the Plymouth brethren, down the court near the vestry-hall—they’ve a sensible style of worship, I loike best. They sit together, and they pray about what they likes, or what comes uppermost—and they ha’ no pews to lock the best people in—and there bean’t no bishops, clergymen, sarvants of the church, or anythink. They’re glad to see me now and then, for they’re awfu’ short of customers.”

“I should be glad to see you at the church—would be more glad to see you than you would give me credit for.”

“Not now.”

“Why not now?”

“Why, one fact be, you’re too *foine* ; and another be, I can’t understand your father, the ’cumbent, who sings out somehow on one note, and that note’s in his nose—‘intonin’ be the crack name for it, I hear. Offence it bean’t, I hope, sir.”

"I am not so easily offended," replied the young clergyman, in the same measured tones. "From what I have heard of you and your son, I think it is probable that the business which brings me hither is more likely to require *your* powers of self-command. You will understand me, that it is a painful commission I am forced to fulfil; but it is my duty, and no other choice is left me."

"Dooty it be, sir—dooty's a vartue! Go on, sir—you won't rile me. I'd speak a little lower though—the wind blows our voices towards Sam, and he's a hot 'un."

There was some clue to the character of young Mr. Stone exhibited in the delivery of his next sentence. He drew himself up very proudly, and commenced relating the nature of his business in a tone several degrees' more elevated than he had hitherto spoken. The cheek of the elder Burles flushed a little; but he put his hands in

his pockets, and listened very quietly to the curate.

Lest the reader should too rashly form his own idea of the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, it is but fair to state, that that gentleman had elevated his voice in no spirit of defiance to the humbler specimen of humanity keenly eying him on the opposite side of the fence. He was only anxious to show that the warning of his fellow man had no power to influence him in that which he thought his duty, and that no sense of fear had kept his voice to the present time subdued.

The elder Burles was right about the wind ; for half-a-dozen words had hardly escaped the lips of the curate of Tenchester before Sam looked round, tossed away his pruning-chopper, and came towards the speakers, at much such a pace, and in much the same shuffling way, as his father had adopted a few minutes since—the ugly dog barking and running before him in a lopsided

manner. Samuel Burles reached his father's side at last; and, without any acknowledgment of the clergyman's presence, set his head a little to the left, and "fixed" the curate in his range of vision.

Both were young men far above the average height—a recruiting sergeant of the Guards would have jumped at either of them. The senior Mr. Burles was close upon six feet, but both his companions topped him by some inches. If there were any difference in height, it was in favour of the minister, although the slim figure of Sam Burles might have deceived, at first sight, one chosen to judge between the two.

Excepting in height, no two men could have been more dissimilar—the contrast appeared even to suggest itself to the senior Burles, who looked from one to the other, and mentally compared his untrained cub with the gentleman by birth and education standing near him. Contrasted with the brown

skin of Sam Burles, the white colourless features of the curate of Tenchester were inclined to be ghastly; hard study had robbed his face of its natural colour, given it a waxen appearance, crossed it here and there with lines, made some dark shading beneath the full grey eyes. It was a handsome face, however, rendered more striking by its pallor and the air of firmness expressive in its every lineament. Looking into such a face, noting the compression of the lips, the ironness about the jaw, the broad massive forehead crowning all, and jutting in just the slightest degree over the eyes, was not to believe in any feeble resolutions or laxity of will. It was a face a Phidias might have copied for Olympian Jove—one might kneel and look therein for justice, but it was difficult to imagine it softening at an appeal for mercy.

Long before the remarks which follow had come to an end, Sam Burles was by his father's side, a most attentive listener.

"This cottage, my father finds, is included in the estate recently purchased of the executors of the late incumbent. As tenant-at-will under the late Mr. Edmonds, of course, Mr. Burles, you are aware of that fact?"

"Tenant-at-will it be," answered Mr. Burles, senior; "that is, so far as I knows—for it isn't much I ha' troubled myself about it, seeing as I ha' never paid a farden of rent, thanks to Mr. Edmuns, who, with all his odd notions, was straight and fair and honest. 'Burles,' says he, one day when I did him a service, 'never mind what *has* been, now—you're a better mon than I tooked you for, and if the old hut at Wingfield Corner's any good for you and yourn, live in it, and welcom', as long as I live—and live in it, it was."

"Yes, and catch cold in it, it is, and rheumatiz under the door, and sore eyes through the places in the wall where the lath and plaster was when Noah built it," was the sarcastic comment of Sam.

"There's none occasion, Sam, for you to speak."

"There's much as you're."

"The genelman don't want to hear your patter."

"The genelman can hook it."

"From inquiries I have made in the town, I did not expect to find either of you particularly grateful for the past favours accorded by my father's predecessor—men who are ungrateful to their God for all His benefits, and return His mercies by shunning the house of prayer, I cannot expect to find grateful to their fellow-men. There is an old proverb, 'He that is false to God, is not likely to be true to man.'"

"You are hard upon us, parson," said the elder Burles, with a less amiable expression of countenance; "and its little you ha' heard agin me, whatever may ha' come to your ears concerning this ere young 'un."

"Who's been saying anything agin me?"

cried Iron Sam, doubling his fists, and giving his dog a kick in his vehemence, as though he had had a hand in it.

"If you will allow me to state my business and begone, I shall be very much obliged to you both," observed the curate, calmly.

"You're always interruptin' some one," muttered the father to his son.

The son looked daggers; and if ever a person whistled a paternal malediction, he did it at that moment. He continued to whistle long and dismally during the rest of the curate's discourse, keeping his gipsy eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"It has suggested itself to the incumbent of this parish that there are many people in the town — God-fearing people — more worthy of the shelter of a home, and less able to work for themselves and their children, than yourself, Mr. Burles. Mr. Stone has honoured me by soliciting my advice upon

the subject, and finds my views concur entirely with his own. Mr. Stone has therefore resolved to place in this little cottage a poor member of his congregation."

"Who be he?" cried Burles senior, fiercely.

"A poor member of his congregation—whose destitute condition, and whose inability to work for many weeks to come, render her a deserving subject for the little charity it is in Mr. Stone's power to bestow."

"A woman it be then—bad luck to her and her bairns, for tearing the roof from our heads!"

"Misfortune descends not at man's bidding," reproved the curate in his lofty manner; "though it has fallen on those who have desired evil to the unoffending. I have no need to detain you further, Mr. Burles; the object of my mission has been fulfilled. I have only to add the re-

quest of Mr. Stone, that you need not disturb yourself for a week or two."

Sam suddenly stopped whistling, to shout, "We'll go to-night!" and to look defiance from his fiery eyes; then he resumed his strain again in a higher key, that split the ears, and was evidently intended to drown the curate's voice.

"For a week or two, until you have found a place to suit you," continued the curate; "and any expense you may incur in the removal, Mr. Stone will be happy to defray."

"Look here!—suppose we come to church—Sam and I, every Sunday?"

The senior Burles winced a little beneath the glance of Mr. Stone; he read his answer there, and did not repeat the question. Turning away, without bidding adieu to him who had brought the death-warrant to what he had considered his little freehold at Wingfield Corner, Burles shuffled back to-

wards the cottage, stepped through the window, and resumed his basket-work. Meanwhile his hopeful son stood and still whistled defiantly, with his impudent dark face turned towards the curate.

Mr. Stone's eyes settled upon this unmannerly savage at last.

"May I ask if that favourite strain of yours be intended for my amusement, or your own?" he asked, with the slightest contraction of the brow.

"For anyone who chooses to listen to it. I don't ask you to stay—p'raps the tune isn't solemn enough for gentlemen of your complexion."

"Your ignorance excuses your impudence—poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow yourself, sir!—I ain't inclined for pity—I hate pity—damn pity!"

Mr. Stone was out of hearing, but that made no difference to the interjections of Iron Sam, who stood and cursed for several

minutes the curate and his pity, and finally wound up with another kick at the dog, who, being used to kicks and continually on guard, darted away, and took his departure towards Tenchester, excessively disgusted with his master's behaviour.

Finding solitary cursing monotonous occupation, Sam Burles turned his steps towards the cottage window. His father looked up as he shut out three-fourths of the daylight with his stalwart figure.

"Out it be, Sam."

"We'll go to-night, or we'll make a fight for it."

"We'll do neither."

"The house isn't fit for a dog—what's the use of being beholden to such"—and Samuel burst into forcible adjectives.

"We might ha' got a five-punder, if you hadn't made a fool of yoursel'," observed the father; "and five-punders don't grow very thick in these parts—leastways I ain't

lucky in the gathering on 'em, if they do."

"There's many ways o' getting 'em," with a scowl.

"And the bad uns is the easiest."

"Ah! it's precious hard to be good, you're foin'ing at last, old mon," said Sam, somewhat scornfully; "you see your friends are turning up, and fortun is coming it like a genelman since you've taken to prayer-meetings. Hollo! here's Mr. Chester back agin. That's the one man in the world I don't wish any harm to. Lor'! how I've missed his sixpences since he's been in furrin parts."

"And there's his wife!" cried the basket-maker; "and a prettier face I never set eyes on, Sam, and that's saying a good deal."

"Ay, ay."

Sam lounged again towards the palings; and Mr. Burles set aside his basket-work for

a second time, and stepped once more through the window.

Mr. and Mrs. Chester were on horseback, and came galloping rapidly by, the slight, perfect figure of the young wife set off to advantage by the well-fitting riding-habit which she wore. Father and son, standing in their rough garden-ground, raised their rabbit-skin caps, and grinned their acknowledgments of Mr. Martin Chester's return. Mr. Martin Chester said a few words to his wife, and then his horse was checked in its career, and came prancing and backing towards the Burles's.

"Well, my men, how has the world been treating you since I left you to take care of yourselves?"

"About as well as we deserve, sir," said Sam, showing a set of pearly teeth; "good and bad luck, like life."

"And the bad luck cooms in a lump to-day, Mr. Chester," added the sire;

"they're going to take the old place away from us arter all these years."

"Oh! I must speak a good word for you both," said Mr. Chester;—"for a fatherly old gentleman, and a mild, lovable youth, who knows how to behave himself—eh, Sam?"

"Mild as milk, your honour," said Sam, with a laugh.

"It's the new parson's doings, Mr. Chester."

"The new clergyman, Burles?" said Martin. "Well, I must try and talk over the new clergyman for your sakes, the first time I am introduced to him. It's all a mistake, I daresay. He don't know the rights of the story, and how you saved old Mr. Edmonds' life."

"He don't care to know."

"Leave it to me, Burles, and don't look so downcast. But I mustn't allow Mrs. Chester to proceed on the King's highway

alone. Here, Sam, I'm in your debt, I think—take this on account, and share fair with the governor.”

A sovereign spun in the air, and was adroitly caught by Sam.”

“He's one of the right sort,” cried Sam: “he don't come and bully you with his mealy looks, and big, grey cat's eyes. He ain't a parson—I hate parsons, and can't abide churches—high or low uns. I'm 'No Church,' and proud on it I am this day.”

“Yes, this is a lucky day for us,” satirically observed his father.

“He'll make it right enough—he's a genelman, and can patter like one. If he don't,” with a bang on the palings with his clenched fist that shook the hingeless gate on the pathway, “I'll remember this morning, and remind that parson of it, if I wait for twenty years!”

CHAPTER III.

TRACTARIAN QUARTERS.

MEANWHILE the Reverend Geoffrey Stone continued his way, dismissing at once from his thoughts the slight accident that had recently disturbed them. That he was always so hard and stern as the last chapter has exhibited, some little incidents on the road appeared to disprove. He could unbend to his favourites; and the gracious smile with which he returned the bows and curtsies of some of his parishioners—even the courtly manner in which he raised his hat—said little for his pride, unless it was

the pride that apes humility. No, I will not hint that he is a proud man, disguising man's common foible by airs of grace and condescension; men such as that do not linger in the village, talking to the children, even gossiping with the old country women about their ailments—one can get the credit of being a “nice gentleman” without taking half that trouble.

The Reverend Geoffrey Stone was one who sought to do good, strengthen the weak and lead sinners to repentance—but then he would do good, strengthen and support, only in his way. In his heart—though, at this period of my story, he might not have acknowledged it—there was no other method to extend the power of the Church, and increase the number of its servants, save that of Geoffrey Stone's. He had fathomed the great secret, and he and his father intending to set to work earnestly in the cause of Christianity, had

raised their banner—a little too bright and gaudy for these practical times perhaps—from the crumbling steeple of St. Jude's.

The Reverend Geoffrey Stone continued his way, got clear of the little village at last, squared his shoulders, took a deep breath of the pure country air as though he enjoyed it, and then marched at a quicker pace up the hill, towards the large white house on its summit, that stood environed with trees. The Reverend Geoffrey Stone always walked up hill at a smarter pace—it was an obstacle to progress after indulging in a smooth country road, and he had *his* way, too, of overcoming obstacles. To proceed more leisurely, and pause now and then to take breath, might be perseverance—but it was the perseverance of the tortoise, and it showed signs of lacking strength.

The house to which the curate of Tenchester was advancing, was a large modern

mansion, lying back from the road, and embosomed in the summer time by leafy-green trees, which concealed it from the passer-by. The mansion of some fortunate, possessed of rather more than a fair share of the world's goods—having a lodge on either side of the pair of great bronze gates, and a winding approach to the house, flanked by some of the noblest elms and limes in the county.

The curate of Tenchester was evidently a visitor well known to the servants of the establishment, and had the right of entering without question. The gates flew back, the lodge-keeper knuckled his forehead, and salaamed the curate into the grounds.

“Lady Cheyne is within, I suppose, James?”

“Yes, Mr. Stone, she is within.”

“Are we to have any more snow, James?”

James, flattered at this solicitation of

his opinion, shut one eye, and critically examined the heavens.

“Heaps, sir.”

“I was afraid so. This is a late season.”

And Mr. Stone proceeded on his way; whilst James rushed into the lodge, and informed his wife oracularly, that “if ever hangelts walked about the earth in clerical weskits and white kerwats, good Mr. Stone was one on ’em.”

The entrance-doors under the handsome portico flew open as promptly as the lodge-gates. Mr. Stone had been expected, and the domestics were on the watch for him.

Does the reader wonder why all this deference should be paid to Mr. Stone, curate, by a pack of menials seldom inclined to pay deference to anyone whose hand drops not the sweet blessing of fees? Is it to be accounted for by strict orders received from head-quarters, or by the rumour began by the lady’s-maid, and circulated like wildfire

amongst the servants in the lower regions, that young Mr. Stone was courting Lady Cheyne's daughter ; and that, when he married, he would require a separate establishment, and give most handsome wages ? Accounted for by the fact, that many of the liveries of Haselton House were looking forward to fresh places immediately Miss Cheyne was married, and they were left to the sole rule and guidance of "the best of missises, but still a one-er !"

What that "one-er" might mean, the future progress of the story may declare. Mr. Stone, though he showed it not on his marble-like countenance, was flattered by his reception at Lady Cheyne's house, and, in the best of tempers, suffered himself to be ushered into the spacious room, wherein Lady Cheyne, her daughter Margaret and a gentleman, awaited him.

Lady Cheyne, like the Lady Jane of rare old Thomas Ingoldsby, was "slim and fair,"

—very slim, but not particularly fair, the writer is obliged, however, in justice, to assert. A thread-paper kind of lady, round whom no amplitude of petticoat, or mysterious fabric of crinoline, could disguise the fact that her roomy skirts concealed the lower half of a shivering little body, not to be trusted on a high cliff in a gale of wind. A lady with all her prominent parts sharpened to fine points—such a lady as I have seen more than once in the clever Hablot K. Browne's etchings, when Hablot Browne has been in too much of a hurry to do himself justice. Report said that Sir William Cheyne, Bart., had married her—she was a wholesaler's daughter—for love, which might possibly be the fact, for there was no accounting for tastes, and people *do* alter as they grow old.

Lady Cheyne was at needle-work, busily engaged in embroidering a rich green piece of velvet with flowers—an occupation in which

she was assisted by her daughter Margaret, a dark-eyed, handsome girl, of twenty years of age. The gentleman sat on the opposite side of the bow window, nursing his right leg with his left, and carelessly flapping a varnished boot with the glove he had drawn from his dexter hand. There was some resemblance to another character, who has already appeared upon the scene, in the features of the third person to whom we have alluded. The brown waves of hair—the clear, open, manly countenance—the hazel eyes, the straight, aristocratic nose—all had their counterparts in the gentleman whom we first saw at Paris, enjoying the last of his honeymoon.

The ladies and the gentleman rose at the entrance of the curate ; and some friendly shaking of the hands, and some observations upon the weather, immediately ensued.

“Ah! my dear sir, your father has betrayed us,” exclaimed Lady Cheyne, in a skittish reproachful manner ; “he promised

to accompany you this morning. 'Without fail, Lady Cheyne,' were his very words."

"My father, I regret to say, is suffering from his old enemy, the gout, and has desired me, dear madam, to tender his apologies, and his regrets that he is deprived of the pleasure of visiting Haselton House. Anxious as he is to discuss with you our arrangements for next Easter, he is reluctantly compelled to decline the pleasure of participating in our conference."

"I fear," remarked Frank Chester, "that I have dropped in at an inopportune moment to pay my respects to Lady Cheyne."

"Not at all, Mr. Chester—not at all," politely responded that lady; "merely a little friendly confabulation on the decoration of our church next Easter-day. Why, you are one of us, of course?"

"One of us?" repeated Frank. "Oh! yes—I am one of Mr. Stone's flock, and have to testify to the effect produced upon

me by many eloquent and earnest sermons, since Tenchester has been honoured by eloquent and earnest men."

Mr. Geoffrey Stone bowed.

"But decorations," he added, rather anxiously—"excuse me, but may I ask what particular decorations are intended for next Easter?"

"It is an appropriate season for rejoicing—holy rejoicing," explained Lady Cheyne; "the Church cannot too forcibly impress upon the minds of its followers the importance, and the sanctity and the sacred joy that ought to gush and, and—all that, you know. Mr. Stone can explain so much more satisfactorily than myself—explain it so clearly and beautifully."

Mr. Stone, thus appealed to, entered into a brief statement of the intentions of himself and father to give character to Easter Sunday. They intended some little alterations in the communion; and also, by the kind

assistance of Lady Cheyne, who had placed the produce of her conservatory at their disposal, it was determined that a season so fitting for decorating the church with the graceful works of the Creator should not be neglected.

"Yes; but could not one admire those graceful works in their own proper place? You will excuse me asking the question, Mr. Stone, but I have not studied the point very deeply, and flowers and evergreens seem rather curious to me in God's house."

"They are God's work—they will stand in the church as a type of the beautiful arisen from earth, emblem of the Divine day we meet to celebrate. Only a narrow mind, misled by the cold formalism of precedent, can urge one objection to the practice."

"Well, I have a narrow mind then," said Frank, sturdily; "for, upon my honour, I cannot shake off the impression that this is a step in the wrong direction."

“Only the novelty of the thing—only the novelty,” remarked Lady Cheyne. “It gives great effect to Protestant worship. I remember at Notre Dame—dear me, what a spasm!”

Lady Cheyne put her thin hands to her chest, and gently patted it once or twice.

“My old nerves flying about like fiddle-strings. Margaret, dear, what have you done with my smelling-salts?”

“This is hardly a fitting time or place for religious discussion,” said the curate; “if you will favour me with a call at the parsonage any hour to-morrow, I shall not despair of making you a convert. Take any ground,” he added, with a quiet smile, “I shall convince you. I spoke of precedent a moment since as against me—why, it is even *for* me, and the custom of decorating Protestant churches has only fallen into desuetude.”

“It seems a pity to revive it.”

“I think not.”

"It leads to discussion—and religious discussion, amongst the lower orders, generally leads to broken heads. There, Miss Cheyne is frowning at me for my irreverence, and I will not pursue the theme. Tenchester may be turned upside down with excitement at this celebration of the rites of Flora; but if you are in the right, reverend sir, why let it keep upside down—we can soon learn to walk upon our heads."

"Mr. Chester is disposed to be satirical," remarked the young lady at her mother's side, without looking up from her embroidery.

"It is the usual sign displayed by those who have the worst of the argument, Miss Cheyne," said the curate; "and," turning to Mr. Chester, "you will pardon me, but it is hardly a fair weapon to wield against a member of the Church, who cannot return your thrust without prejudice to his cloth."

"I will say no more to wound your

feelings, sir," said Frank, rising; "perhaps I am in the wrong—I have not sufficiently studied the holy fathers. I thought too much of what the little world of Tenchester might say—as if that little world could know better than its spiritual pastors and masters!"

"What the world will say!—ah! Mr. Chester, it is the old weakness that has worked so much evil, destroyed so many souls. My teaching says, 'Shake the dust of the world from your feet.'"

"Good teaching, sir, but hard to practice. I wish you a good morning."

Frank shook hands with Lady Cheyne, bowed somewhat stiffly to the curate, and then crossed to Miss Cheyne, who had risen, and was bending over her workbox, at the further end of the room.

"I hope I have not pained you very much, Miss Margaret?" he said, in a low voice.

"It is of no consequence."

"If anything I have said——"

"You have expressed nothing which, as a free agent, you have not a right to express," she said, coldly—"I cannot see the necessity of favouring me alone with your apologies."

"But I would not pain you for the world. I may have no right to offer my apologies to you, Miss Margaret, save that we are very old friends—have been the best of friends. Save that——"

"Mr. Chester will excuse me, but this conversation must appear very mysterious to Mr. Stone."

"And Mr. Stone is the idol for everybody's worship," said Frank, pettishly. "I give you good-day, Miss Cheyne."

And Frank Chester walked away in a huff, and snatched at his hat from the tree with a violence that left the lining dangling on the peg, and brought Mr. Stone's hat down

with a formidable crash. Frank Chester for a moment seemed inclined to leave the hat of the curate in ignominious juxtaposition with the tessellated floor, but he stooped after a moment and replaced it with a bang, that did it considerably more harm than if he had left it where it was.

He went out at the front door, and saw a few yards therefrom his brother and his brother's wife, advancing on horseback slowly up the avenue.

"What, Frank, old fellow," said Martin, as he approached, "what takes you so early from Haselton House?"

"Business, Martin," he replied; "those confounded account-books have been falling into arrear."

"But did you not promise to meet us here this morning, Mr. Frank?" inquired pretty Mrs. Chester.

"I forgot about the account-books then, Mrs. Martin," he replied, with a flushed

cheek; "and I'm sure you'll both excuse me."

"I don't think I will, you renegade," said Martin.

"But you must, my boy. Business is business; and old Grimley, of the firm of Chester, Grimley & Chester, gets cross if we leave him all the work."

"I intend to set to work in the old red-hot style after I have got over this morning call," said Martin; "we can return together, Frank."

"Thank you, Martin," said he, more firmly; "but I *must* go back now."

Martin glanced keenly at his brother.

"No little tiff since Lady Cheyne and her daughter Margaret paid us a visit of ceremony and congratulation yesterday, Frank? You and a certain fair lady seemed very good friends then."

Frank's cheek flushed again.

"Miss Cheyne and I have nothing to

quarrel about. Good morning, Martin—I shall see you in the afternoon. Good morning, sister.”

And, anxious to evade further interrogatories, Frank Chester took his departure at rather a rapid pace down the winding carriage-road.

CHAPTER IV.

ASKING A FAVOUR.

MR. MARTIN CHESTER appeared to get on better that morning with the Reverend Geoffrey Stone than his brother had done before him. No inflammable questions led to the quick assertion and the hasty retort—no question of High Church or Low Church brought up an argument difficult to be conducted with coolness and propriety. Nothing was said of the intention to hold an ecclesiastical flower-show within the walls of St. Jude's; the conversation took a general turn, and, as Lady Cheyne and her daughter

offered no explanation as to the object for which the green velvet and embroidery was intended, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Chester were too well-bred to make inquiries.

Martin Chester and Geoffrey Stone talked of politics—speculated on the summer, and the summer's harvest—how the young wheat was looking, and how the town of Tenchester got on with its new drainage—whether Lord Palmerston or Lord John, or the Earl of Derby or Mr. Horsman, were likely to be the next prime-minister.

The young merchant and the young clergyman met for the first time on pleasant debatable ground, and each took kindly to the other. Martin Chester thought the curate a well-educated, clever young fellow; and Mr. Stone considered Martin a great improvement on that impetuous, hasty brother of his, who had been more forcible than choice in his remarks that particular morning.

Pretty Ada Chester, who sat by the side of Lady Cheyne, and listened to that lady's tedious account of the trouble she was in about her servants—that, and her nerves, and the improvements at St. Jude's, were her three topics of conversation,—found time to look across at her husband now and then, and to think what a great many points of resemblance there were between him and the curate. There was the same broad forehead, dark eyes, Napoleonic lower jaws—the same vigorous power to resist expressed upon each face, softened though it were by the nature of the subject upon which they were discoursing. Two such men, head of a faction or a class, might lead an army of men their own way—two such men opposed to one another would battle to the death.

Ada wondered why she should think of those two men battling to the death—two well-bred gentlemen, living in an enlightened age—wondered whether some little news she

had already heard of Mr. Stone, coupled with a remembrance of the dialogue she had had with her husband in their hotel at Paris, could sufficiently account for it. It was very strange to think, sitting there, of those two men opposed to each other—much stranger to remember that she had thought so when the time came wherein she was not so happy, and the honeymoon, and all the love therein, was a dream to look back upon, and feel her heart sink.

Some allusion to the garden lying beyond the bow-window at which they sat suggested to Martin Chester the idea of descending to it from the broad terrace and steps outside, a proposition that was seconded by Mr. Stone, who enjoyed the fresh air all the more heartily that diligent research confined him to his study many hours of every day.

Ada and Miss Cheyne were inclined to join the gentlemen, but Lady Cheyne thought the cold air would strike to her nervous

system, and it was very early in the season to think of venturing out of doors; so Ada and Miss Cheyne stopped, purely from complimentary motives, whilst the gentlemen descended into the spacious garden grounds of Haselton House.

Strolling about the grounds, lightly discussing the beauties of the country, and admiring the order in which Lady Cheyne's numerous staff of gardeners kept the lawn and parterres, it suddenly suggested itself to Mr. Martin Chester to sound his companion concerning the occupants of the cottage at Wingfield Corner. Mr. Geoffrey Stone did not look like a man inclined to sleep on any project he had formed, and perhaps if he let slip this opportunity the next time might be too late. Mr. Geoffrey Stone had only to hear the rights of the case to feel interested in those poor ignorant brutes, the Burles's. Such a man as the curate ought to exercise no small influence for

good over the poor fellows who had received verbal notice of ejectment. It was rather peculiar to ask a favour of a man within half-an-hour's introduction to him; but time was a slippery old gentleman, and he had been always inclined to take him by the forelock. Had he not, the firm of Chester, Grimley, & Chester would have never made itself a name out of Tenchester, or been quoted as a first-rate house by shrewd City people in the dark London lanes where so much money is turned.

"I have been having a little conversation this morning concerning some property of your father's, Mr. Stone," was his first remark.

"Indeed, sir," was the reply; "may I enquire what property is that to which you allude?"

"A little cottage at Wingfield Corner, at present in the possession of the Burles's."

"Burles?—yes, I believe Burles is the name."

"The father tells me you have expressed a wish that they should vacate the cottage tenanted by them for so many years."

"Such is the wish of my father and myself."

"Perhaps you are not aware under what peculiar circumstances that poor man, the basket-maker, came into possession of the cottage?"

"He rendered some service to the late Mr. Edmonds, I believe."

"He saved his life at the risk of his own. It was in the flood times, when our little stream broke bounds and swamped the country. Mr. Edmonds was a new comer at the time; he missed his road, and was borne away by the waters. Burles, who heard his cries, sprang in after him, and rescued his life at the hazard of his own."

"An heroic action, performed by one very unlike a hero. Well, there is a hero more in Tenchester, Mr. Chester, than I expected to find."

"I thought you would admire the bravery of the deed."

"I always admire bravery."

"Mr. Edmonds' most appropriate reward was to offer a man, who before that had been but next door to an outcast, the shelter of a home. It was a poor home enough; but it was a palace at that time to Burles and his gipsy wife,—and they were grateful, I assure you, Mr. Stone."

"At the time it was natural. How far Burles and his son respect the memory of their benefactor now is another question, which there is no occasion to discuss. I regret to turn out Burles after so many years; but you must agree with me that in Tenchester it is not difficult to find persons more worthy of relief, and who have greater claims upon a clergyman's consideration."

"Yes; but the wish of your predecessor stands for something, I hope."

"No wish of Mr. Edmonds' has been expressed to us. My father purchased the cottage with the rest of the property."

"Well," said Chester, tired of the subject, "you will consider the position of the Burles's?"

"I have considered it, Mr. Chester."

"You will not make up your mind too hastily?"

"My mind has been made up several days. Nothing can shake it now."

"Very well, sir," with a slight frown; "if the case itself make no impression on you, my arguments as special pleader will certainly be of no avail. I regret I mentioned the subject, Mr. Stone. Shall we rejoin the ladies?"

"You will understand, Mr. Chester, that before the details of the case were known to my father, a promise was given to another, a sick woman grievously afflicted. That promise surely you would not urge me now to break?"

"Certainly not, sir," was the brief rejoinder.

The curate and the merchant returned to the house with their first impressions of each other a little shaken. Neither was in the wrong, yet each felt a little hurt at the other's persistence in the cause. Mr. Chester could not expect Mr. Stone to break his word to accommodate one who an hour before was a stranger to him; and Mr. Stone could not expect to reconcile Mr. Chester's ideas of justice with his own—for, had he known three days before all the particulars concerning the grant of the cottage, he would have found some other means of benefiting the poor member of his congregation, without disturbing the rude couple at Wingfield Corner.

Certainly Burles and Son had not treated him with any great respect—had made many unpleasant remarks on him, his father and his profession, only to be excused by

the wretched ignorance of the speakers. He was not indebted to them; they had treated him with rudeness, and it was not his duty to displace the worthy for their sakes. He dismissed the subject from his mind—the Burles's must go; for the fiat of the Stones had gone forth, and the Stones never gave way.

When Martin Chester and his wife were riding back to their villa on the outskirts of the town, Ada inquired how her husband liked the curate of Tenchester.

“Oh! a very good man, I should think.”

“You and he seemed to get on very well together for a first interview, Martin.”

“Yes, very well. He's plaguily firm, though.”

Ada laughed.

“Have you been remonstrating with him on his choir, or his High Church doctrines, dear?”

“No; I spoke a word for the Burles's,

and got my comb cut for my officiousness. Well, it serves me right; it was rather early in the day to solicit a favour, Ada."

After they had ridden a little way in silence, Martin said:—

"And what is your opinion of the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, Ada?"

"He appears to be very gentlemanly; I hear he is very earnest. Lady Cheyne spoke rapturously of him after he and you had left the room."

"Indeed!"

"Lady Cheyne hints at grand doings at Easter in the parish church."

"Grand doings!—what does her ladyship mean?"

"I did not inquire. She enveloped them in so much mystery, and treated me only to that species of half-confidence, which always makes my fingers itch to box somebody's ears."

Martin smiled; the energy of his little

wife put him into a good temper—and, though he would not have felt inclined to acknowledge it, recent events had rather ruffled his equanimity. For Martin Chester was not inclined to hear the word “No”; for many years he had had his own way, and it had been “Ay” to his rise in life, to his fortunes, to his hopes of Ada becoming some day his wife.

Across his face fell the shadow as they came in sight of the cottage at Wingfield Corner. For a moment he reined up, and called out “Burles”—but Burles was not at his usual post by the window, and he waited rather impatiently for some response to his summons.

He was thinking of riding away, when Iron Sam came dawdling from the back of the cottage, in his shirt sleeves, and with a short pipe in his mouth. Sam increased his rate of progression when he became aware who waited for him in the roadway.

“Where’s your father, Sam?”

"Gone to market wi' the baskets, Mr. Chester."

"It doesn't matter much. Tell him I have done my best for him and—failed."

"I knowed it," said Sam, with a dark scowl.

"You shan't feel the loss, however; tell your father that. Good day!"

"Good day to your honour."

Sam watched him turn the bend of the road, then knocked the ashes from his pipe against the palings, and fixed the pipe, *Hibernian* fashion, in the band of his hat. Having accomplished that operation, he thrust his hands in his pockets and walked back towards the house.

"He's won the toss. He's a great man, and the game's agin me. I said I'd remember it for twenty year, but it woant be twenty, ten, five, before *I* cry quits with him."

CHAPTER V.

BROTHERLY CONFIDENCE.

MARTIN and his wife made their first appearance at St. Jude's on the morning of the following Sunday. There were many changes in the church since old Mr. Edmonds' time; but most of them were for the better, and only lovers of the antique could have found room for objection. There were one or two alterations about the communion-table, the novelty of which jarred a little on the sensitive nerves of Martin Chester; the prayer-books were embellished with brass crosses, and the communion-table was covered with

black velvet, on which a huge white cross stood forth in bold relief. Martin thought these papistical signs might have been dispensed with, but it was the season of Lent, and the incumbent might have his peculiar views on the solemnity due to the occasion.

If High Church only consisted in those few alterations—a choir, and some incomprehensible bowing at certain periods of the service—why, he, as a man of liberal mind, saw nothing particularly objectionable to make an outcry against. He would have preferred the service in the old style, with the charity children yelling in the cupboards at the sides of the organ, and the organ out of tune and short of wind. He would have taken the charity children and the organ as a set-off against the intoning, and been glad of the exchange; for the Reverend John Stone's intoning did not add much to the solemnity of the service, and the townsfolk in the free seats, not yet accustomed to the

change, sat and stared, and kept their mouths open.

Mr. Martin Chester could not help comparing father with son, and being struck with the difference between them, even in his snug family pew at St. Jude's. For there was none of that intellectuality visible on the countenance of Mr. Stone, senior, that had so struck him in his introduction to the son. It was a wooden countenance, broad and heavy, and covered about the forehead with strange bumps. It might have been cut out of wood with a hatchet, for the expression of anything but dogged lumpishness it conveyed.

The morning prayers were followed by a sermon of the Reverend Geoffrey Stone's, that roused the congregation, and kept all ears open. Martin, sitting by his rapt wife's side, felt his weak objections to the curate, to the changes at St. Jude's, melting away rapidly beneath the fire of no common

eloquence. He could put up with a great deal for the sake of such a minister at St. Jude's; he would pardon him that cool "declined with thanks" in the garden of Haselton House, last week.

There were few inattentive listeners during that service. Frank Chester, with all his growing antipathies to the curate, was as enthralled as the rest of the congregation—only Lady Cheyne, the latest and greatest convert to High Church, was at all abstracted; with her poor nervous head weighed down by the feathers in her bonnet—nothing more. The attitude deceived one or two of the townsfolk, who glanced humbly in her direction—it looked so very much like peaceful slumbers. Ada Chester thought so, till she and Martin met Lady Cheyne and her daughter outside the church, and Lady Cheyne told them how she had been suffering that morning, and how she had enjoyed the sermon—so powerful and rousing!

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Chester became regular attendants at the church of St. Jude's. Martin, previous to his marriage, had limited his public devotions to once a day, sometimes once a fortnight when the day was particularly fine, or even wet; but the application of his earnest little wife set him a better example. Women are more thoughtful, prayerful than men, and she had been brought up by an uncle very precise in his religious duties. Still, once or twice before Easter, which came late in April that year, Martin objected to too many visits to St. Jude's; for there was service every day in Lent, and Mrs. Martin was ever anxious to attend, even take her husband with her, notwithstanding business demands upon his time.

"Frank or Mr. Grimley might take your place for a short time," said Ada, a little fretfully, for her lord and husband had declined to accompany her one morning in Passion week.

"But, my dearest Ada, you must consider as head of the firm I cannot set so bad an example; besides, we are very busy just now."

"Ought business to be the first consideration, Martin?"

"Business ought not to be neglected, Ada, even for prayer," he replied.

"Very well, Martin," with a trembling voice, "do not neglect it then for my sake; I must go alone this morning."

Martin hesitated; but he had said No, and the No of a Chester was decisive in most cases. He went to business, and Ada to church. Over his account-books that morning he thought of the bright, earnest face of his wife in the pew of the Chesters, and wished, with a half-sigh, that she was not quite so enthusiastic and impressionable. Whatever Ada entered into was begun and prosecuted with her heart and soul; and her religious feelings had been stirred by the curate's sermons, and the impressive service

at that particular time, and in that particular manner adopted at the parish church of Tenchester. Add to this, that Lady Cheyne and her daughter called frequently at her villa, took her often to Haselton House, where she met Mr. Geoffrey Stone again, and where Mr. Geoffrey Stone spoke of little but his doctrines.

It is a dangerous thing to have a pet preacher; one swears by nothing else after a time—believes in nothing that runs counter to his views. It becomes a settled thing that he is always right, and that everyone of a different opinion is for ever wrong, until the mind becomes as much affected by his faults as by his virtues. Ada Chester became a stanch advocate of the doctrines and ceremonies of the High Church party, and of many religious mysteries that she had had but a dreamy knowledge of till that period of her life. Mr. Stone was so learned, and the light of his ability cleared

up all that had been hitherto so dark. His life had been spent in the study of the Scriptures, and his soul was in the glorious profession to which he belonged—he could *not* be wrong. If only those who sneered at him and his “Puseyism” had but let him reason with them! She followed his creed, and, even in her little earnest way, began to assume some degree of firmness. Firmness was essential in these times, and she clung to her own opinion on certain abstruse theological doctrines, on which her husband had *his* opinion too.

Still she was a loving, gentle wife, and obedient on all points save one, that she thought was not included in her marriage vow—obedience to her husband’s suggestions as to what was due to religion, and which the proper method of showing one’s gratitude and love to Him from whom all religion sprang.

Martin, however, remained the faithful, easy husband of yore: he had never been fond of religious controversy, and if his wife were happy, did it matter if she were of High Church or Low? It was not his wife that troubled his mind with any forebodings, or the prophecies of his second partner, Mr. Grimley—a very hot-tempered middle-aged gentleman—that disturbed him a great deal; prophecies that every day Tenchester and England were going nearer to ruin, and that Papistical plotting was undermining the Church in every direction. Martin was more concerned about his brother Frank at that time—his brother Frank generally so happy and light-hearted!

Martin missed a look of content on his brother's face, saw there was a newborn thoughtfulness in his eyes, and knew that the smile with which he greeted him of a morning was but a counterfeit of the old. Martin was distressed at this; for, next to his

wife, brother Frank lay nearest his heart. Before his marriage he and Frank had been together all their lives—playfellows, school-fellows, partners; and there was an affection existent between them stronger than fraternity generally exhibits as example.

Their respective natures made it almost impossible to run counter to each other; for Frank, despite a hot temper at times, was always prone to give way. Martin never proposed a plan to which Frank first objected, before it was, "Well, let it be so," from Frank, after five minutes' consideration; and Frank, since the early loss of father and mother, had looked up to his brother as his guardian and the master-mind of the Chesters. Martin knew he had only to ask to become aware of all that was distressing Frank's mind; and it was only Martin's objection to solicit confidence not bestowed upon him unasked that prevented the breaking of the ice between them.

It was resolved upon at last. Martin took the initiative over the books in the counting-house, when Frank, with his motionless pen in his hand, was staring at the opposite wall.

"Frank, what has given you that miserable hang-dog look lately?"

Frank started, and for a few seconds wrote on with forty-horse power.

"You are getting moped to death between business and single-blessedness. Why don't you get married, you rascal; have not I set you the best of examples?"

"Ah! you're a happy man. You have a home, a loving wife, and everything to make one contented. I'm cut out for a crusty old bachelor, whose chief enjoyment will be to look in upon you of a day, and scold all my nephews and nieces."

"Bosh!"

"Why, you don't think anyone will care for me sufficiently to share *my* home?"

"Give some one a chance—that's all."

"There's only one I shall ever care to marry, and she's beyond my reach."

"What's her name? Who's beyond the reach of Frank Chester, partner of the firm of Chester, Grimley, and Chester, I wonder?"

"Well," with a big sigh, "what do you think of Miss Cheyne?"

"High game, Frank; but still to be brought down by a long shot."

"Yes, if one aim straight."

"Sir William Chester was not of the aristocratic order—he made his money by trade, and was created a baronet for raising a volunteer regiment when Napoleon I. kept England on tenter-hooks. Lady Cheyne was only the daughter of a wholesaler, like ourselves—and, what is more to the purpose, Lady Cheyne and Margaret are always glad to see Frank Chester at Haselton House."

"They *were* glad, until the Stones came unsettling everybody, and the graces and accomplishments of the young curate cut a fellow as clean out of any regards as I could cut the core from an apple. There was a chance before; but I shilly-shallied—and, lo! the extinguisher descended on me, and shut me in with the darkness."

"The 'Faint heart never won,' &c.," quoted Martin; "and a man is ever tortured with doubt till the plain question is put. There, take your hat and settle the matter at once: it is not the creed of the Chesters to sit still and let others win the prizes that should fall to their share. Put yourself out of misery, like a man."

Frank leaped from his high stool.

"I have seen a great deal of Miss Cheyne, and know her to be amiable, and open as the day," continued Martin. "I have—you will forgive me, Frank, I am sure—had the curiosity to watch you and her together once

or twice, having my suspicions whither your heart was straying."

"Well, what did you think?"

"That if anyone save yourself had designs upon Miss Cheyne's heart there was no time to be lost."

"But that was before the curate came."

"Oh! confound the curate; he's getting a regular incubus. Not an hour passes but Geoffrey Stone turns up in one way or another—he is given me for breakfast, bumped down on my account-books, insinuated in the very middle of my own valuable advice. You need not fear *him*."

"I'll go, Martin; it isn't manly not to face the worst. You were not long in facing the enemy, and making the flag dip to the conqueror."

He said it in his old, hearty manner, and Martin congratulated himself on the effect produced by his own eloquence. "That Frank" would have gone droning on for months had

it not been for him. Martin was becoming quite conceited.

Frank had his hat on, and was at the door, when Martin called him back and extended his hand. Frank placed his within it, and received his brother's formidable squeeze.

"Good luck, old boy."

"Thank you, Martin," was the reply, "thank you, whatever may be the result of this formidable plunge *in medias res*. You will never want consoling and encouraging, brother, or I might promise you a return for this some day. Here's to the fight!"

"God speed you!"

Martin might as well have gone to church that morning with his young wife for the little assistance he was to the accounts. He sat and thought of brother Frank and his love troubles, until the sun pattern got from the floor to the wall, and from the wall into his eyes, without adding one figure

to the great brass-bound ledger before him. Frank was a good fellow, and deserved to be happy. How those last words of Frank's rang in his ears and sank into his heart. He would remember them till his dying day—they were so earnest, they proved how deep-rooted was the attachment between him and his brother.

“You will never want consoling and encouraging, or I might promise you a return for this some day.”

No, he would never want consoling and encouraging, thank God! He had won the object of his love, and all his cares were at an end. Safe in the harbour, he had wished his brother God speed on the deep waters, and then thought alone of the happy news with which Frank might return smiling a few hours hence.

Truly, he thought not of consolation or encouragement to himself in the Battle of Life; saw not, through the veil hanging across

the days to come, the sorrowful lonely figure
of himself, and that brother bending over
him !

CHAPTER VI.

A LOVE SCENE.

FRANK CHESTER, though he did not go on his way rejoicing, yet proceeded in the direction of Haselton House with some sort of hope to sustain him. Fresh from Martin and all the cheering, soul-assuring words that he had given him, Frank did not feel his courage failing him till he had passed the cottage at Wingfield Corner, where the rooms were empty now of the Burles's, and a carpenter and plasterer were patching up the ruin. Past the "half-way house," Frank's spirits began to droop; and when

in sight of Haselton House he could only think of the last time he was within its walls, and of the little skirmish of words he and Margaret Cheyne had had over the workbox, when he had asked her forgiveness, and she had nothing to forgive.

Frank crawled slowly up the hill, and stopped at the entrance-gates, breathing hard.

"Is Lady Cheyne in?" he inquired of the lodge-keeper.

"She will be shortly, Mr. Chester."

"Is Miss Cheyne at home?"

"She went in the carriage with her ladyship to church."

"Oh! I'll wait then."

Slowly along the drive, and at last in the well-known room, where he had so often seen Margaret—where, he thought a little savagely, he had had so many chances of popping the important question to greater advantage than the present, and he had let

them all go by in his foolish nervousness. He heard the grating of the carriage-wheels at last, and he ran his fingers through his hair in an embarrassed manner, and tried to fancy his heart was not beating any faster—not a bit of it!

Presently the door opened, and he gave a little jump, though it was only the small, shrimp-like body of Lady Cheyne that wriggled into the room.

“My dear Mr. Chester, I thought you had abandoned us.”

Mr. Chester stammered out something about the pressure of business, as the thin, excessively beringed fingers of the lady's right hand were tendered him for a moment.

“I trust you have not been waiting long for us? Margaret and I have been to St. Jude's—have heard the most enchanting, the most divine, the most excruciatingly touching sermon that young Mr. Stone has ever blessed us with. Oh! he is a dear;

good man—touched with the true fire of heaven, and all that sort of thing.”

“Hum—yes—I suppose so,” answered Frank, in an absent manner—the curate of Tenchester, or the curate’s sermons, not troubling his mind much at that moment.

“A powerful preacher—so much more vigorous than his father—though he’s a wonderfully learned man, they say, and so rich; his father—that is Mr. Geoffrey Stone’s grandfather—was a lord, and he—that is Mr. Geoffrey Stone’s father—was a younger son, but that, of course, don’t account for the powerful sermons, which are wonderfully good, but almost too much for my nerves.”

This uninteresting gabble gave Frank Chester time to arrange his forces for the attack on the one great outpost in cases akin to his—the young lady’s mamma. Vanquish that formidable fortress, O lovers—silence the heavy battery of those hundred guns of doubt, and reserve, and frigidity,

and you are three-fourths of the way to success. Papa is but a silly old popgun after that—papas are always led by the nose in these matters—and the young lady is almost sure to drop a curtsey, and say “Yes!”

“Lady Cheyne,” began Frank, at last, “I have been tortured so much by suspense the last few weeks, that I have resolved to ask you and your daughter to put an end to it at once. You will not care to hear the prolix statement of all that I feel, and have felt these four years, for your daughter; it will be sufficient to say, that I love her with all my heart—that I do not expect, do not look forward to, any happiness without her; and that I am here to ask your generous consent to let me plead my own cause with Miss Cheyne.”

“Bless my soul!” cried Lady Cheyne, struggling with her breath, “how impetuous you are, Mr. Chester. I really don’t know

—I really can't say—I really haven't considered. Oh! my nerves, how they're twitching!”

“It must have suggested itself to you, Lady Cheyne, that I have not been a frequent visitor to Haselton House without a motive—that this is not a sudden, transitory passion, which another year may see die out. You have known me and my family for many years—you can trust your daughter's happiness to my care?”

“Yes, so far—that is—that is—good Lord, what a spasm!” and Lady Cheyne took her head between her hands, in a gingerly manner—for she had a new lace cap on.

“I shall be happy, Lady Cheyne, to enter into the details of my position and prospects; to prove to you that the world has not treated me badly since I was made junior partner in my brother and Mr. Grimley's firm. I can offer her the home of a gentleman—promise her that, though

my position at the present moment does not warrant me commencing with so large an establishment as this, yet that she shall not miss any of the comforts she has been accustomed to enjoy within it. I will make a greater promise even, Lady Cheyne — I will make her happy ! ”

Frank, warm with the subject, only paused to take breath ; and was about to commence again, when Lady Cheyne broke in.

“ My dear Mr. Chester, of course I am flattered — Margaret will be flattered by your offer—so respectable a family, and all that sort of thing ; but, but—oh ! my bursting nerves, be quiet for one moment, and give me proper utterance !—but have you sufficiently considered the state of Margaret’s own affections, or whether any encouragement on her part has entitled you to make this offer ? ”

“ Encouragement implies design, Lady Cheyne, and Margaret is open as the day.

I think she knows I love her—I hope so. I am very much deceived if she be ignorant of the feelings I entertain towards her.”

“Oh! my nerves—going it dreadfully in all manner of places!” murmured Lady Cheyne, gently rocking herself to and fro; “so soon after Mr. Powerful’s stony sermon—Mr. Stone’s powerful sermon, I mean. Passion week, too, when the heart and the mind should be full of thoughts so different, and the world should be kept as much in the background as possible.”

“May I request an interview with Margaret?”

“Leave it till Easter week, my dear Mr. Frank.”

“I would prefer my proposal being considered at once, Lady Cheyne. May I——”

Lady Cheyne sprang up with alacrity.

“I’ll prepare my dear child for the trial then—I’ll go to her at once. You must not be too pressing with her, sir. I think

it's all a mistake. I fear you have been too premature—will you excuse me?”

And Lady Cheyne darted from the room with all the agility that one so little burdened with flesh might be expected to display on energetic occasions.

Frank walked up and down the room to cool himself after Lady Cheyne's departure. He had been very much excited; he felt rather nervous and heavy about the head, as though he had caught Lady Cheyne's complaint; and as for his knees—they were uncommonly shaky, to be sure. For a moment he paused in his perambulations, and held his hand before him to make sure that it was not so steady as its wont. Convinced of that fact, he started off afresh with his perambulations, and wondered when Margaret would come and put him out of his misery.

When he was becoming impatient, and had increased his pace to such an extent,

that had any unfortunate mortal been in the room underneath he would have driven him raving mad, Margaret appeared.

Alone, too—not with her mother, as he had feared. Was not that a good sign?—the best of signs! He sprang towards her, and then his heart sank as he felt how cold and still her hand lay for a moment in his own.

“Margaret,” said he, looking eagerly into the pale face of the young girl.

“Mr. Chester,” said she, withdrawing her hand, “you have requested my answer to a proposal with which you have honoured me. I have, at your request, come to give it.”

She crossed to a chess-table by the window, and leaned one hand upon it, as if for her support. How very white she was in the sunlight, and how her bosom heaved! With what death-like force her words smote upon the listener, though the voice was very low and tremulous.

“Had Mr. Chester more seriously considered the step he was about to take, I— I think he would have spared me the trial of this morning.”

“Trial, Margaret?”

“Yes, sir, trial. You press me for an answer at a time when my heart and mind are equally disturbed. You pain and embarrass me to no purpose; for you alone know how utterly every wish of yours lies apart from mine.”

“Miss Cheyne—Margaret, I do not know that,” he cried; “I cannot believe it even now. To believe it is to hurl in the dust every hope that I have formed for future bliss, and leave me a lonely, miserable wretch. Margaret, it was not yesterday we met for the first time—it was not yesterday I learned to love you—and it is not the passion of a day that casts me at your feet!”

He would have flung himself before her, had she not cried out, in an imploring, frightened tone—

“No, no, Mr. Frank, you will spare me—you must spare me this! You and I can never be more to each other than we are now. Our ways lie wide apart, and there is no ties of love or sympathy to make the distance less. Pray, leave me now, before my mother returns. I wish so to be alone!”

“Miss Cheyne,” said Frank, more coldly, more sternly, “I believe you can remember the day, distant as it is, when that love first sprang from friendship, and struck root within me. I believe there was a tie—weak, fragile, to be broken by a breath, perhaps, but still a tie—between us on that day. You were seventeen then, and wore white roses in your hair—and it was summer!”

Did she remember that day, too—and had her young girl's heart beat more warmly then for the lover pleading there? It seemed so; for the low, mournful words—

a wail, as it were, for what had died out in the past, and left him desolate—made the colour mount to face and neck, and the deep dark eyes swim with tears.

“It was summer, then, Miss Cheyne, and the sunshine of that day crept into my heart, and filled me with vain dreams.”

“I was a girl then—a wild and foolish girl,” she murmured, at last; “do not reproach me with that day. You have no right—there dates from, it no claim.”

“No, no; for all the world I would not say so,” he said, hastily; “it was the dawn then, and I was waiting for the sunrise. Ah! Miss Cheyne, I lingered too long by the wayside, and the usual fate has fallen on the loiterer. The dawn has been followed by the daylight; but another lives therein, and the darkness is for me!”

“Mr. Chester, you must go—I will not hear more; it is merciful to spare me.”

“Margaret, I can almost hope still, to

see you moved like this," he cried ; " almost hope that four years' faithful service has left some little impression in my favour. Dare I —dare I, Margaret?"

She had turned her head towards the window, and the tears were falling fast. She did not know his hand was seeking hers again, until she felt her own within his clasp.

" You must leave me," she cried, struggling to release her hand ; " I will not listen to another word—all is at an end between us."

" Tell me so again, then ; look at me once again and tell me so, and then—good-bye ! "

Her tears fell faster on her dress, and the hand seemed to make less effort to escape from its imprisonment. The deep sobs seemed to madden Frank too.

" Margaret, there is some mystery in this. Will you not tell me all?—will you not——"

The door opened, and Lady Cheyne bustled into the room. Frank released her hand, and let the mother take his place.

"Oh! dear, dear, dear—oh! my poor dear nerves—oh! my poor dear child—oh! Mr. Chester, you have been too wild and inconsiderate; you will not take your answer like a gentleman, and go away."

"I am waiting for it, Lady Cheyne," said Frank, humbly. "I ask for your daughter's answer—I promise to abide by it. Knowing Miss Cheyne so long, I am sure she will respond to me freely and truly—for that response affects the whole tenor of my after-life."

He spoke to Lady Cheyne, but his words were for the daughter sobbing on her breast.

"Mamma, mamma!"

It sounded like an entreaty; but Lady Cheyne did not appear to understand the appeal thus—and who knew her daughter better than her ladyship?

"No, my dear, no; it is for you to answer now—Mr. Chester might put a false construction on your silence, and on my reply. Courage, my dear girl; oh! my poor weak, twitching nerves!"

Margaret looked up at last—even left her mother's arms, to advance a step towards her lover and extend her hand.

"Good-bye!"

"Oh! no, no—not good-bye, Miss Cheyne! It is good-bye for ever, if I leave you thus."

"It must be good-bye for ever, then. For ever to your dreams of happiness with me; for ever to those foolish hopes which you will not believe I sought to encourage for a moment."

"I will believe it all a dream, Miss Cheyne."

"You will wake up a wiser, better man, and find one who will make you a far happier bride than I. Dream-land is fairy-land,

and the visions therein belong not to any real and earnest world. Good-bye, Mr. Chester."

"And all ends here—everything?"

"Everything!" she repeated, with white lips.

He took her hand in his, raised it to his lips a moment, bowed to Lady Cheyne, and went away. The door closed between them, and she was shut out from him, and once more in her mother's arms. Yes, it had all been dream-land, and this was the real world!—what a cold, freezing world to wake up to and live in!

Frank went on through the green lanes and felt no sunshine—strode into the town of Tenchester and surprised the many who greeted him, and who looked up for his usual smile, by a grim unconsciousness of their friendly salutations.

Into the place of business, through the offices to the private room where Martin sat,

as he had left him an hour or two ago. Martin looked round with an air of anxious inquiry as his brother entered, and he felt there was no need to ask what fortune he had met with. Martin wished he had not pressed his brother to go to Haselton House then. We who know so little what is best for ourselves, are so sure of what is the real thing for our friends!

"Martin, I have a request to make to you and Mr. Grimley," said Frank.

"What is it, Frank?"

"A request for leave of absence for a fortnight, or a month, as the case may be. I must go abroad, and see the world a little."

"A change will do you good."

That was all the brothers said for many a long day about the love-spell that had shattered. Each felt that it was better to dismiss it thus, than bare the deep wound by a host of questions and replies. Martin left it to Time, and Frank was grateful.

CHAPTER VII.

EASTER SUNDAY.

FRANK CHESTER packed up his portmanteau and his love-troubles, and took them away from Tenchester that same day. Martin went back to his villa and his pretty wife; and, looking into Ada's face, thought more than ever of his brother's run of ill-luck. Like a good husband who kept no secrets from his wife—Frank would not have wished him for his sake—Martin told the story of his brother's love and its rejection: and Ada, on whom every impression fell

with no light weight, cried all the evening, as for a brother of her own.

“Poor Frank!” she said, late in the night, “he will find comfort in prayer to heaven for his earthly sorrows.”

Ada, in her innocent enthusiasm, thought Frank must fly into the arms of the Church, and of some such a good man as the Reverend Geoffrey Stone for his consolation; could not imagine him turning at once to the world, and in its vortex—into which he who plunges never comes forth the better man—seeking to forget his disappointment. In her troubles she would have gone to Mr. Stone, and his spiritual advice would have helped her at her need. But supposing Martin—her dear Martin sitting there—had fallen in love with some one else just after she had fallen in love with him, what should she have done, not having had then the pleasure of knowing Mr. Stone? Oh! dear, that was too awful to think about.

Some sort of good Mr. Geoffrey Stone had worked with his father's flock : he had taught it to think a little less of its own troubles, and to have some sort of regard for the misfortunes of others. Most of his followers, at all events the feminine portion, he had set working in a good cause : he had made them helpers of the sick and needy—organized them into bands for relief of the poor—poor in spiritual want as well as purse ; and he had not scrupled to boldly command those who had money to spare, to freely use it on those to whom money was almost salvation. And yet the poor and needy were not grateful to Geoffrey Stone : it was the way of Tenchester—it is the way of the world. They thanked their ministers and lady patronesses, and took everything that was bestowed upon them ; but they would talk of "Puseyism" at St. Jude's, and how they had never remembered such doings in their time—such singing, such a lot of crosses,

such funny ways of droning out the prayers. Mr. Geoffrey Stone was a good man, mayhap, although a rich man can always afford to give; they would give away lots of things themselves, if they were not likely to be missed; but Mr. Stone wasn't exactly the sort of man *they* cared to see in the pulpit. He or his father didn't pray for them, for *they* did not want to be prayed for through the nose; he and his father did not preach to them, but talked to the fine people and the gentlefolks, excused their own peculiar innovations on the Church, and swarmed St. Jude's with "singing men." They couldn't bear it, and they'd be glad to see the back of Stone and son, despite the touches of the hat and solemn curtseys invariably bestowed upon them.

The poor and the idle were set gaping and speculating on the Saturday before Easter, by the arrival of some mysterious and weighty packages from London, that took

all the railway guards and porters in the place to carry them to the parsonage; by waggons and carts oscillating between Haselton House and St. Jude's; by some twenty ladies, amongst whom were Lady Cheyne, her daughter, and Mrs. Martin Chester—being very busy all day holding conferences at the Stone establishment; by the church being lighted up till twelve at night, and great preparations going on therein, and by Mr. John Stone and his son being for ever on their legs, and flitting to and fro like restless, large-sized ghosts.

The town became excited, and the little dirty boys mustered in great force; and people who were going to market stopped to stare instead, and did not get their baskets filled in proper time—stopped to talk and shake their heads, and prate more than ever about the “goings on.” Adventurous youths got into the church-yard, and amused themselves with “budging” each

other up towards the windows, till the beadle chased them amongst the grave-stones, and played solos on the less agile with his cane.

Mrs. Martin Chester was prettily mysterious even to her husband, when he came back from business that day. Mr. Stone intended to observe Easter in true and becoming fashion, and she was sure Martin would be delighted by the charming and appropriate decorations of the church—Mr. Geoffrey Stone had such wonderful taste!

“I hope he has thought as much of his sermon as he has of his decorations,” was Martin Chester’s remark.

“Did not the curate always preach a good sermon?” asked Mrs. Chester, reproachfully.

Well, there was not much to object to in his sermons. He hoped he should be able to say the same to-morrow of the trappings and trinkets.

“Why, Martin dear!” exclaimed his wife,

"*you* have no objection, surely? You are the last person, I could fancy, anxious to prejudge."

"I passed through the town ten minutes ago, and quiet old Tenchester was bubbling over with excitement. I heard one or two phrases the reverse of complimentary, applied to the incumbent and his son; and if any grand surprises are intended for the morrow on the sober-thinking members of the church, I do not believe they will be agreeable ones."

"A few flowers cannot excite the people very much."

"Is there any occasion to excite them at all?"

"I do not believe they will be put out in the least."

"*Nous verrons, ma chère Adie.*"

Martin Chester always evaded an argument with his wife. She was an excitable, lovable little thing, and a little made her

eyes dim, and her lip quiver. Not that a little would always make her give in; she might shed showers of tears, but she would still hold, now and then, to her own opinion—and Martin was hardly aware of this, for he loved his wife, and her wishes seldom crossed his own. He gave way to her more readily, knowing that her impressionable nature felt keenly—almost too keenly—a disappointment; but he was confident in his heart that he had only to express himself decisively, for Ada to acknowledge him the lord and master to whom all obedience was due. He had a giant's strength—(men who knew him in business, and had watched his progress, and men who served under him, were aware of his deep determined nature)—but it was tyrannous “to use it like a giant,” more especially on one whom he so loved and idolized.

The Easter morning came, and Martin and his wife walked arm in arm to church.

Ada was a little doubtful of the imposing effect of the church decorations now, and glanced a little anxiously into her husband's face as he entered the sacred edifice. She fancied there was an expression more grave than ordinary upon his face that morning; but still, he was always grave entering church, and she might possibly be mistaken.

The Reverend John Stone, his son, and supporters, had certainly done their best to give effect to the Easter service in the church of St. Jude's; and the conservatories of Lady Cheyne and others must have been freely drawn upon for the floral display of that morning. Every pillar had its device—its wreath, cross, or letters in flowers, and the altar was a blaze of camellias, and lilies, and *fleurs immortelles*, set off by dangling veils of embroidered lace. On the communion-table, or rather altar, was spread a green velvet altar-cloth—already seen at Lady Cheyne's—embroidered with gold and

coloured silks in sundry devices. There was a super-altar placed above this, to give elevation to a large cross and to two massive candlesticks, in which the waxen lights were burning. That all this show was imposing to people fond of "sight-seeing" is possibly true; but that most people could have prayed better without it is equally certain.

All the pomp and gewgaws of this kind, could only affect the morbidly sensitive, and startle and pain those brought up in a simpler fashion, and inclined to worship God with their hearts, instead of hanging up flowers, and lace, and velvets, and calling *that* religion. They had called *that* religion in the darker times, before Martin Luther burned the papal bull—they had called it so in Bloody Mary's time—they had called it so when Protestant Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury, and a nation with one voice had thundered "NO" to it.

And the true heart of a great nation will have none of it again; the evil will work its own cure, and the reaction will come in its time. Those men who put their faith in flowers, and crosses, and flaunt them in the eyes of true believers—for the true belief is not in the blowing of trumpets, the raising of banners, the lighting of candles—will drop off like dead limbs from that parent tree whose roots are still deep in the soil, and whose leaves rustle still in the air of God's heaven. They will drop off in their time, and the sect-oppressed world may see this new generation of wise men form a church of their own, and leave the Mother-church free from its mountebank sons. And Mother-church will be the stronger and better for it in its latter days—the Book records it shall be so.

The church of St. Jude's was very full that morning; and the free seats were crowded with the poor members of the con-

gregation, on whose faces were expressed curiosity, amazement, even contempt—everything but devotion. Tenchester had certainly been taken by surprise; but, as Martin had anticipated, the surprise was far from agreeable to the majority. Tenchester was behind the time, and the new fashions had never been patronized by it. Tenchester people could not even swallow a new religion, without making a wry face over the attempt.

The Reverend Geoffrey Stone “intoned” that morning, and left the sermon to his hard-headed father—and a dull dogmatic sermon it was, with the arguments all on one side, and nicely conclusive to minds like Lady Cheyne, who preferred others thinking and praying for her to thinking and praying herself; and to whom such a fancy religion was a mild excitement, that kept her devotion to “the sticking place.”

The Reverend John Stone alluded to the

display with which he had astonished the eyes of his flock; used all those well-worn shabby arguments to prove that he and his tractarian brethren were right, and that each step they made was away from the Romish church and its superstitions, in lieu of towards it as their irreverent enemies had declared.

Martin listened very attentively, but he was not convinced. His theological reading had not been extensive, but he felt assured no sufficient reason for the flower-show before him, for the green velvet and embroidery, instead of the "fair white linen cloth" on the communion-table, had been offered or was likely to be offered. He would wait till the evening before he expressed his own opinion. Mr. Geoffrey Stone was a learned man, and likely to make a better explanation.

Mrs. Chester was delighted with the service, the anthems, the decorations—and

pressed Martin to declare his sentiments respecting them. But he shook his head and said, he would not express a hasty opinion; much was mysterious and incomprehensible to him, and as they who had taken so grave a step were doubtless actuated by the best of motives, he would not judge them arbitrarily or in haste. He did not say it pained him to see the effect produced on the mind of Ada, who could think or talk of nothing else; he would not lightly disturb her religious feelings, or try to influence them without good cause.

Early in the afternoon he was surprised to receive a visit from his second partner, Mr. Grimley, a stout little man in knee breeches and silk stockings, who still wore powder in his hair and buckles on his shoes. Mr. Grimley was in a state of great excitement, and he had hardly shaken hands with Martin and his wife before he dashed into his subject.

The proceedings that morning had been disgraceful, abominable, papistical: *he* would not have it—he would use his influence to put a stop to it. He would memorialize the incumbent; and if that wouldn't do, he would complain to the bishop; and if the bishop turned out a failure—alas! how many bishops do turn out the most wretched failures in the world—he would petition Parliament to put a veto on such infamous practices.

Mr. Grimley had not half finished his denunciations before Mrs. Martin Chester had quitted the room indignantly.

“Bless my soul, Mrs. Chester is not imbued with papistical notions, Martin?” inquired Mr. Grimley, missing her at last.

“I hope not,” with a quiet smile.

“She hasn't a leaning—ever so slight a leaning—to Stone and Son, fancy parsons, florists, and milliners?” said he, bitterly; “don't tell me that, Martin.”

"She admires the power and earnestness of the curate's sermons, I believe."

"And you, my dear boy? You I stood godfather to when your father was my partner before you—when your father was my best friend?"

"Why, *I* am not inclined to agree with all Mr. Stone teaches at present."

The old man was delighted. His face beamed again, and he shook hands once more with Martin, and was glad it was not so bad, after all.

"I am going to Mr. Stone's this afternoon. I called here on my way thither, thinking, perhaps, you would like to accompany me."

"Not to-day, Mr. Grimley—not till I have more fully considered the matter."

"Strike while the iron is hot, Martin."

"No—not to-day," said Martin again.

"Very well," said he, a little warm again; "it's the first time you have re-

fused me anything. I'm sorry for it, Martin, for there's nothing I would have refused you, my lad."

"But, my dear sir, you have reflected on the matter; will you not allow me time for consideration also?"

"Certainly I will," he cried, thus appealed to; "and you'll be of my opinion before long — every sensible man is. I'll go to the parsonage at once; and pray make my apologies to Mrs. Chester for anything I may have said in the heat of conversation that has unintentionally wounded her."

Martin promised to make his peace for him with Mrs. Chester; and the old gentleman took his departure, confident in his power to shake the convictions of the Stones, and have all the church decorations removed before the evening service. When he had gone, Ada, pale and trembling, returned once more into the room.

"Martin," she said, flinging herself into a chair, and beginning to sob violently, "you might have spared me the insults of that rude boor."

"My dear, Mr. Grimley has not insulted you, that I can see. Mr. Grimley was unaware of your interest in the decorations of St. Jude's; and, in his distaste for them, spoke perhaps a little too warmly."

"A little!"

"He desires me to tender every apology to you for his thoughtlessness."

"I will not accept apology," said Ada. "I have said the man is an ignorant clown, and his apologies are as distasteful to me as his previous remarks. I hate him!"

"Spoken in a very Christian spirit," replied Martin, with some irony. "Mr. Stone's sermon or Mr. Stone's decorations appear to have made a great impression on your mind."

“ Oh ! Martin ! ” cried the young wife, looking at him for a moment with intense surprise, and then renewing her tears and sobs, and rocking herself wildly in her chair—“ Oh ! this from you, from *you* ! ”

Martin had not intended his words to seriously affect his wife, was not prepared for this abandonment to grief. He flew to her side, and strove to console her by his kind words and entreaties ; and after a while the storm subsided, and the clearing up shower having passed away, the sunny smiles broke forth again.

It was the first little quarrel—and, hand in hand, they promised it should be the last—the very, very last !

“ You forgot that Mr. Grimley was my oldest friend, my father’s friend, Ada ; and I, that my Ada had a heart which the lightest reproof could rend. We were both a little wrong.”

"Yes, I was too hasty," said Ada; "but then," she added, after a pause, "how hasty and hot-tempered Mr. Grimley was—you didn't find fault with him, and make him cry."

"I should have had a great deal more trouble to impress him," said Martin, laughing; "he is very hard to move, at times. But with many wrong ideas, with much irritating obstinacy, he is the best-hearted little man in the world—and you will think so some day, Ada."

"Oh! I don't like him," with a shudder; "he is so unlike my Martin."

"And so opposed to Mr. Stone—eh, Ada?"

"Yes; and it is very wrong to set up his feeble arguments against the life-studies of two such men as our incumbent and his son."

"But, my dear Ada—*ahem*, I think

we'll have tea, my dear, or we shall be late at church this evening."

They were not late at church, however, though they found St. Jude's crowded to the doors, and had some difficulty in forcing a passage to their pew. The news of the decorations had spread like wild-fire through the town, and all Tenchester had turned out to see the sight. Men and women, boys and girls, who had not troubled St. Jude's since they were married or christened, flocked to church. There was little sight-seeing in Tenchester, and no one with time on his hands cared to lose anything attractive. As Martin forced a way for himself and wife, he caught sight of the tall figure of Samuel Burles, standing in the aisle, with arms folded bravo fashion, and with not a very devotional expression on his countenance. The poor, the maimed, the halt, even the blind had come to St. Jude's that night,

and there were too many curious and forbidding faces midst the mass to make that of Iron Sam's remarkable.

It was a sight that had not been seen since St. Jude's was built ; and more than one face looked somewhat anxiously from its pew, as the mob grew more dense, and there was some scuffling in the aisles for better places and more elbow-room.

The service commenced quietly, the candles were lighted on the altar, the gas shone out from every flower-wreathed burner, and the people of Tenchester seemed inquisitive—nothing more.

The mass of the unwashed had not come to pray, or to remonstrate—simply to stare ; and there was plenty to stare at in St. Jude's that particular Sunday. The service proceeded without any striking interruption from the presence of so large a number of people. Once or twice there were suppressed murmurings at portions of the service that

appeared too striking for the unwashed ; and once a voice, which Martin thought he recognized, exclaimed, with startling distinctness—"He crossed himself!—did you see that?" This observation was followed by renewed murmuring, and, for an instant, Geoffrey Stone looked up from his book, and regarded the people with flashing eyes. Martin remembered that look for many a day ; it told of the curate's will to resolve, and spirit to defy, but nothing of that humility and meekness of spirit, which were the attributes of greater, holier men than he. It was not simply a reproof to the people—it was his challenge ; and the people, for a moment silent, began to murmur louder than before. That look said—"I fling my gage upon these altar-stones, and will defy you to the death!"—and there were more than one remembered that look when Tenchester was troubled, and the bitter waters had risen.

Geoffrey Stone preached the sermon, but

made no allusion to the decorations around him, as Martin had wished and anticipated. The reverend gentleman considered that sufficient explanation had been given by his sire, and he availed himself of the present opportunity to address the poor and lowly amongst his congregation, and to exhort them to a more regular and more earnest course of prayer. He forgot his decorations in his enthusiasm, and in the fine opportunity for conversion that lay before him ; but the crowds in the aisles had not come to be preached at, and were not tired of whispering, or looking about. Such a sermon in the market-place, from Mr. Geoffrey Stone, at any hour, or any day—amidst the baskets and the refuse fruit and vegetables, with the worry and bustle of business around him—would have done its work on many hearts ; but there, in his own pulpit, and in God's own temple, not a single emotion was aroused. They were talking beneath him of the flowers, of

the crosses, of the tapers, of the gay altar-cloth, and every word he uttered was received with complete indifference.

He sighed as he concluded his sermon ;— he felt all had been preached to the winds, and that his chance of doing good had, somehow, slipped by him. Was it his own weakness, or were the uneducated and the poor harder to teach than he had believed ? The service was ended, and Martin and his wife went with the stream of people which slowly drifted out of church—drifted from the glare of light into the dark churchyard, and settled into groups amongst the graves, where much talking and gesticulation followed ; drifted with the news to the sick and bed-ridden in the courts and alleys at the lower end of the town ; drifted into the highways, and to the corners of streets where the beer-shops were, and where angry words began to flow, and “apostolic blows and knocks” to aid the force of argument.

One man, a greater fanatic than the rest—a little hump-backed tailor, who had been a nuisance to the town for the last seven years, and who was pious and drunk by turns, according to the seasons—began to declaim against papacy in the streets, and to gather a number of excited faces round him. The people were being made tools of by a Catholic priest; Tenchester was being led to the feet of the Scarlet Lady, and the Reverend John Stone and his son—he mentioned names, for he was a poor devil, and not afraid of libel—were wolves in sheep's clothing, Jesuits in disguise, agents of the Evil One, and other stereotyped phrases used by stump-orators in general meeting from time immemorial. Martin drew his shuddering wife past the crowd, and hurried on with her—not quick enough, however, to escape hearing the following words levelled at him by the orator, who knew him well, and owed him a grudge for treating him contemptuously one day

when he wanted to borrow five shillings.

“And the great men of the town—they who should set a proper example to those lower in the scale than themselves—side with the Jesuits, and encourage them in their crossings and bowings, and mumblings, bringing the Church—the great, glorious, free Church of Protestant England—into disgrace, and helping to support, by their presence, by their purse, by their——.”

“Now, sneaking Jemmy, stop this noise when your betters are going by,” and the hand of Iron Sam descended heavily on the hat of Jemmy aforesaid, completely extinguishing the oratory, and giving a turn to the thoughts of the crowd, who burst into a laugh, and dispersed in better temper.

“Well, Ada, have the Tractarians done well?” asked Martin, as they neared their home.

“The Tractarians have done no harm, Martin, dear,” said Ada; “it is not fair to lay

to their charge all the evil-speaking, lying, and slandering, of those wretched people we have seen to-night."

"The old proverb is reversed then—'out of good cometh evil'—in Tenchester."

"Are you siding with the vulgar herd, Martin?" cried Ada.

"Do I stand in the gutters of the High Street, and attempt to rouse the passions of my fellow-men?"

"No, Martin, dear; but you are so strange to-day—so hard! In your heart you are turning against two of God's faithful ministers."

"Ada," said he, gravely, "my heart does not acquit them; my faith assures me they are no more nor less than other men—see as darkly through the glass. They have little right to set up in our Church those forms and symbols peculiar to a religion they would disavow—and they have less right to do it in the face of the many whose feelings are

shocked by it, and whose repugnance to it is insurmountable. There is a standard for all sermons, it appears to me, for all form of prayer—simple earnestness without parade. We have seen it in St. Jude's; it is practised by many men dissenting from the Church, and held by it in contempt; our Saviour preached and prayed so on the Mount!"

END OF THE FIRST PART.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

A SKIRMISH IN PLEASANT STREET.

THE REVEREND GEOFFREY STONE did not flinch from the helm because the wind blew a little. He drew the belt of his faith tighter, and set his face to the storm, and the Reverend John Stone imitated his example.

The reader will perceive I place the father after the son, and make the first the ruling agent. And Mr. Geoffrey Stone was the master-mind, and only nominally was his father head of St. Jude's. The incumbent trusted implicitly in his son, left the care of the Church and his flock to that gentleman,

and was content to shut himself in his study, pore over abstruse doctrines, and rummage for precedents in the writings of the holy fathers! Dogged and obstinate was the Reverend John Stone with every one but his son, who ruled him in his quiet, firm way, and without even expressing a wish that he should be so ruled. The incumbent was fond of his ease, of his books, of everything but hard work, which he left to his son, whose energy he knew, and in whose power he could trust. Leave the incumbent to his crotchets, and he was a good, quiet man enough; he gave alms to his favourite poor, for he was a rich man enough—and after he had given tithes of all he possessed, there was plenty to spare for the flowers and carved crosses, and other symbols of his class.

Be he never so lazy, an obstinate man once roused into action will put his shoulder to the wheel in real earnest; and the aspect of affairs in Tenchester, after Easter Sunday,

roused all the dormant energy of the incumbent. The townsfolk continued to murmur; the *Tenchester Times*—for Tenchester had a paper all to itself—took the Low Church side, and came out with withering leaders, which doubled its circulation. The people in the streets were always talking of the “Puseyites,” and the incumbent and his son were scowled at in their walks, and called after by dirty boys and girls from the factories. Sunday after Sunday passed away—the decorations increased—the crowd surged regularly in and out—visitors from adjacent villages made a point of coming to Tenchester to see the Puseyites—the murmurings grew louder during the service, and no efforts of the churchwarden, beadle, or pew-opener could put a stop to them.

Tenchester folk split into the three factions—High Church, Low Church and No Church. High Church sang and intoned, Low Church began to read the responses

in opposition, and No Church grew rampant with excitement, and took to swearing and brawling, and going to St. Jude's in delightful anticipation of a row. Booksellers' windows began to break forth with pamphlets—by a parishioner—by a clergyman—by a member of the Church of England—by a Tractarian—reasons for and against everything were put forth with great persistence and less perspicacity. "Puseyism not Real Christianity," was combated by "Puseyism (falsely so-called) an antidote to Popery;" and pamphlets on all sides and by all writers proved everything but the virtue of concession—taught everything but peace on earth, and good-will amongst men. Shake the Church to its centre, and turn it from a house of prayer to a house wherein the Devil riots and takes stock of souls, but do not budge an inch, for conscience's sake! In the midst of all this turmoil Mr. Grimley, head of the Low Church party, put up for church-

warden, and was elected by an immense majority over Mr. Sleek, the disappointed candidate.

The Reverend John Stone had the privilege of appointing one churchwarden, and of nominating another against whom opposition could be entered; and opposition having set in against Mr. Sleek, Mr. Grimley reigned in his stead, and his speech on that occasion was worthy of John Lilburne. He promised those who had elected him fifty impossible things; he pledged his word to eradicate Puseyism from Tenchester, and show himself a burning light to all churchwardens, present and to come. An incumbent had no right to take upon himself the task of superintending the embellishments of the church—that was a churchwarden's duty, leave it to him! Mr. Grimley, strong in his cause, gave orders for the decorations to be removed; but Mr. Watkins, the churchwarden appointed by Mr. Stone,

gave contrary orders—and the skirmishing between these two gentlemen was incessant, and of the Kilkenny cat description. Mr. Grimley managed, however, in the absence of his brother churchwarden, to clear off a few cart loads of flowers late one Saturday evening, and received notice of an action from Mr. Stone's solicitor in consequence, with as much satisfaction as though it had been a thousand pounds order for goods.

So time went on: anthems were sung, prayers intoned, bowing and genuflections performed as usual; the people, irritated by opposition, grew more determined—and the incumbent and son more determined too. Frank Chester came back from his continental trip, to find Tenchester at red heat, discussing theology; and to hear, from more sources than one, that the Reverend Geoffrey Stone had proposed to Miss Margaret Cheyne, only daughter of Lady Cheyne of Haselton

House, and been accepted as that young lady's future husband.

"Well, he will make a good husband enough," remarked Frank to his brother; "and as Lady Cheyne and the world would call it 'a good match,' why, society ought to be satisfied—I am!"

Frank made the observation in his own light-hearted manner, and Martin was glad to hear him speak after his old fashion. He could not believe that Frank had shaken off every thought connected with his first love, but he knew the effort to do so would exercise a salutary effect; and it was pleasant to have Frank at his side again. Martin and Frank had many a talk together concerning the Tractarian practices at St. Jude's, but could hit on no medium course that would be acceptable to priests and people. Time might work its own cure; the changes at St. Jude's would be a nine-days' wonder, and then Tenchester would be itself again.

But Tenchester was predestined for many months of hot water yet; there were heavier clouds on the horizon than had hitherto darkened the excited town, and the way of the wind would bring them to the parish presided over by St. Jude. Affairs took another turn one Saturday evening, when the Reverend Geoffrey Stone was passing through the town—passing with his eyes bent downward, thinking, perhaps, of to-morrow and to-morrow's sermon, perhaps of the fair girl who was to be shortly his wife. Now there was a particular beer-shop in Pleasant Street, Tenchester, standing at the corner of a dark and narrow court, that Mr. Stone junior had been advised to shun by more than one of his followers, who knew the "whereabouts" of the roughs that came to St. Jude's every Sunday, to mock the minister with their insulting jeers—men of the true brute creation, who came purposely to scoff, and never remained to pray on any pretence whatever.

These men spent half their lives at the beer-shop ; were seen morning, noon, and night hanging round the doors, leaning against the posts or the adjacent wall, or seated three or four of a row on the kerb-stone. Fights took place between them every day, and the county police always found their work cut out in getting them to Tenchester police-station, or safely lodged in Tenchester gaol. And though a great many got to the police-station, and from thence to gaol, the numbers never seemed to thin. Reinforcements to this large division of blackguards filled the places of the lost ones, and fought and swore and blasphemed with as much unction as their predecessors. When the navvies worked further down the line, and took their oaths and big boots to other parts of the country, some unfortunate coincidence brought slack work to the factories or the mines in the neighbourhood, and kept business thriving at "The Peaceful Rest"—the

facetious *sobriquet* bestowed by an ironical landlord on his house of entertainment for man and beast, and principally beast.

Mr. Geoffrey Stone, since the warning mentioned in the preceding page, had taken a great deal of pains to pass "The Peaceful Rest" as often as possible—not, perhaps, from sheer obstinacy, but to show his friends and those benighted men how little a sense of fear influenced the motives of the curate of Tenchester. Let Mr. Geoffrey Stone receive more than an usual amount of abuse from the lower orders, and he was certain to pass through their head-quarters on the following day. He did not go on purpose, but he remembered some particular member of his flock living that way, and requiring spiritual consolation—and to that member he went accordingly.

There was a rare muster of the ungodly at "The Peaceful Rest" that Saturday evening alluded to. It was a late hour. Some of the

men had a week's wages in their pockets, and were drinking away about fifty per cent. previous to going home to their wives, and presenting the remainder as a generous contribution to the week's housekeeping: others, having no money, were sponging on friends who had—and both were quarrelling and revelling in uncomplimentary epithets when the Reverend Geoffrey Stone approached.

There was one man amongst the idlers that evening who noted the arrival of the curate with no little satisfaction—one man who had promised himself a revenge for past sternness towards him, and was only biding his time. It had not come that evening, but he might pay off a small instalment of his hate nevertheless, and it would be a pleasant thing to see the parson put out. So he leaned against the front of the beer-shop, and stretched his legs right across the narrow pavement, along which Mr. Geoffrey Stone was advancing. Half-a dozen hulking vagabonds, who had re-

ceived the hint, stood also in the way, and completely blocked up the right of passage, leaving no choice to Mr. Stone but opposition, or a *detour* round a large black puddle which stretched completely to the other side. Geoffrey Stone had already taken in the nature of his position, though he advanced at the same pace, and with the same abstracted gaze. For a moment, his better nature prompted him to cross the road and take the other side of the street, but he would have had to betray an indecent haste to avoid a recurrence of the same result there; for the men, scenting mischief, were hastening across to imitate Iron Sam's example, and thus completely block up the right of way. So, at his full height, and with a firm ring of his heel on the pavement, he marched towards his tormentors, and halted only within an arm's length of Iron Sam.

"I must trouble you to move, my good man," said Geoffrey.

"Only parsons are good men in these parts—call people by their right names, sir."

"By what name shall I address you?"

"Dog."

"I must trouble you to move, my good dog," coolly observed the curate.

Iron Sam's gipsy face darkened to that of a negro's at this address, which turned the laugh a little against him, and he retorted—

"Good dogs hold fast and keep their place, and arn't inclined to move for tarnting words. Foind some other way to pass."

Geoffrey Stone glanced across the street, and saw the systematic obstruction prepared for him there—looked for a moment at the black puddle, and replied—

"I see no other way to pass."

"There's the road. Better men nor you take to the road every day, and," with a scornful laugh, "it beant the first dirty job you've done in your time."

"I shall pass on the pavement."

"Shall you?"

"Do you intend to resist me?" setting his teeth hard.

"I doan't say that. You needn't look so savage, parson—I wor here afore you, and I arn't a right to move into all manner of positions for your 'commodation. P'raps you'd like me to take my hat off and cross myself when you go by, and wish your holy rev'rince good morning. P'raps——"

The knuckles of Geoffrey Stone, inserted between the neckcloth and the throat of Samuel Burles, cut short the latter gentleman's suppositions, and swung him with a splash ankle-deep in the puddle, which the defective drainage of Tenchester had allowed to accumulate.

"Make way!" cried the curate, thrusting right and left. "Do you think me a child or a coward, to be brow-beaten like this?"

The men gave way: the resolute air, the flashing eyes, the herculean proportions of

Mr. Stone, exerted their usual effect, and Geoffrey Stone had cleared the "Peaceful Rest," when Iron Sam, getting clear of the puddle, rushed like a maniac after him.

"Stop!"

Mr. Stone continued his progress until his adversary was full front with him.

"Who are you—to strangle people in the streets?" cried Sam, with a demoniac expression of visage. "Are you a man to fight?—damn it, are you a man to fight, for here's your match!"

"No—I shall not fight you."

"You are a coward—you shan't go by this way! Now, try to serve me that choking trick again."

Sam stood on his guard; the two powerful men glared at each other with unflinching eyes—there was danger in him of gipsy blood, but there was no sign of flinching in the pale resolute face of the minister.

" Shall I tell you what I intend to do ? " said Geoffrey.

" What you intend to try, you mean ? "

" *To do.* "

" Tell away, if its amusing. "

" See you locked up in the station-house before I leave you. "

Sam laughed bitterly, but the laugh was not of long duration ; one of the curate's long arms had reached his collar again, and the other was guarding the shower of blows which Sam Burles' windmill-like arms were raining in his direction. The blows fell thick and fast, and several hit their mark, despite the efforts of the curate, and made him stagger, and bruised his patrician face, but only tightened his hold of the bird's-eye cravat of Samuel Burles. They swayed from the pavement to the road, and back again ; into the deep puddles, against the wall, and even into the passages of houses, the doors of which gave

way suddenly, and let them in. The men shouted, and cursed, and danced around the combatants; and one burly coward struck at the hat of Geoffrey Stone, and knocked it from his head. Pleasant Street was up in arms and out at windows, and the sharp crack, crack, crack of the rattle told of the police of Tenchester waking up to action. Sam Burles, despite much pugilistic practice, had found his match in strength, and an inch and a half more than his match in height; and there was no getting free from that vice at his throat, fight and struggle as he might.

The police were in Pleasant Street at last; and Geoffrey Stone was released from his unclerical position, amidst the hooting and yelling of Samuel Burles' confederates. The presence of the law, however, kept these men too much in check to organize an attempted rescue of the prisoner, and they contented themselves with swearing, and shouting at

the curate, and going through a kind of football performance with his hat.

"I give this man in charge for grossly insulting me," said Geoffrey.

"We'll take care of him, sir."

"He's a liar. I've done nothing," shouted Sam—"I wont go to prison at this man's bidding."

And Sam would have lain himself flat on the pavement, had not the kind arms of two or three policemen helped to prevent him. Sam gave in at last, and consented to be marched to the police-station, whither he went, followed by a motley rabble of men, women and children, with a policeman on each side of him, and, at a little distance, the curate walking bare-headed in the same direction to prefer his charge, and looking, despite his swollen and discoloured features, as cool and collected as when Samuel Burles, late of Wingfield Corner, stopped his way at "The Peaceful Rest."

CHAPTER II.

MARTIN MAKES AN EFFORT.

THE next day (Sunday) following the capture of Samuel Burles, witnessed a turn for the worse in the state of affairs at St. Jude's. All the evil in Tenchester flocked to church that Sunday evening to see Mr. Geoffrey Stone's black eye, and to take advantage of anything that might turn up to make a noise, and disturb more peaceful worshippers.

And whether men dead to all reverence for God's house of prayer had organized a disgraceful scheme to disturb that evening service, or whether a more strict adherence to

the Tractarian form of worship had disturbed the sensitive feelings of these ruffians, certain it is, that a far less amount of respect to time and place, and a greater effort to manifest a sense of disapprobation at the service, were testified that night.

Responses were shouted out in opposition to the choristers ; murmurs arose at every movement a little out of the common of the curate and his father ; and hisses—such as damn a playwright's hopes at a theatre—followed the anthems and the end of Mr. John Stone's prayers. The uproar and confusion were at their height when Geoffrey Stone reproved them in the pulpit for their profanity, and rendered the rest of his sermon completely inaudible. Martin felt glad that the service had terminated without a riot ; all that evening he had been fearful of it, and his study of the degraded mass crowding the aisles had rendered him inattentive to the service. He feared the effect of every

word of Mr. Stone's ; and one vagabond, who was particularly anxious to incite his neighbours, Martin had singled out, and was quite prepared to leave his pew and fasten on him. But the service was concluded without any need for a display of 'physical force, and the congregation dispersed out of St. Jude's at the usual rate ; those most disreputable hanging about the churchyard and the streets, and talking themselves to fever heat.

That evening's exhibition had confirmed Martin's resolve to seek an interview with the Stones on the following day ; his keen observation saw the clouds closing and threatening to burst over his unhappy parish church, and he felt assured a few more Sundays—perhaps the next—would witness a more serious termination. It was his duty, though he shrank a little at the prospect, to warn the incumbent and his son of all that threatened them.

Early on the following morning Martin

went to the parsonage. He had apprised no one of his intention ; he had even left Ada to her remnant of the morning's slumber, and was advancing towards the rose-covered porch of the garden as the clock of St. Jude's was striking seven. Before he had reached the house the door was opened with a wrench—a person came hastily out, slamming the door after him, and nearly ran against Martin in his abstraction.

“What, Burles!” exclaimed Martin ; “this is an early hour for you to seek spiritual consolation.”

Burles senior looked up and touched his rabbit-skin cap.

“Spiritual consolation it bean't,” said Burles ; “the devil a bit of any consolation is one likely to get here.”

“You are put out, my man,” said Martin ; “has anything gone wrong?”

“Wrong it be. Ha' anything gone right since such a man as *him* I've left coomed to

Tenchester with his crosses and holy water. He brings trouble on us—but it will end with trouble on him, too, mark my word, Mr. Chester.”

“ Well, what’s the matter? ”

“ Ah! you’re the ony man in the town who’d ask me that, and loike to know, and do your best to help me—which you can’t.”

“ Sam’s at the bottom of your trouble, for a sovereign.”

“ Right you are, sir. Sam it be—or rather,” with a groan, “ Sam it bean’t—for Sam’s locked up, and will get a month or two if he goes before the county mag——”

“ What has he been doing? ”

“ Foighting the parson, worse luck it be,” groaned Burles; “ getting half-drunk at ‘ The Peaceful Rest,’ and then interfering with other people’s business. I ha’ been to the young clergyman to ax pardon for Sam—I ha’ begged him not to press the charge agin a man who’s

not the best or quietest as he be—the Lord knows what a prison will make him ! ”

“ This is bad news, Burles.”

“ He be a good boy in his way,” said the old basket-maker ; “ he woan’t work, and he be a bad temper—*ha’* kicked me when I’ve riled him too much with advice ; but he be a good boy—such a spirit, Mr. Chester—loike a lion’s ! Ony too much foire in him, though, nothing more.”

“ What does Mr. Geoffrey Stone say ? ”

“ That the foire maun be taken from him—that he ha’ outraged the laws of his coountry, and must take the consequences, and all that nonsense, as if a man could answer for himself when he’s groggy. But doan’t let me keep you, sir—you can’t help me.”

“ I fear not,” replied Martin, remembering the failure of his last efforts in the Burles’s cause.

“ The parson woan’t ha’ mercy, though he preaches about it so much. He be a nice

man to forgive those who trespass agin him, bean't he, sir?"

"I don't know the particulars of the case," responded Martin; "but I have not much doubt who was in the wrong."

"Ah! doan't laugh at poor Sam, sir. He be done for, now; and they'll cut his hair, and make a black sheep on him, and shut him in a hole a man can't swing a cat in; and Sam was so fond o' liberty, and feeling free-like, for he had his mother's gipsy blood in him—and now his character's lost, and the Burles's is disgraced!"

"How's work, Burles?"

"Tidy it be, sir; but I put on a little extra steam, for there's rent to square now."

"I suppose a shilling or two won't be objected to, Burles?"

"Thankee, sir," said Burles, pocketing the money offered him. "I doan't want it for myself. It'll do for Sam when he comes out of Tenchester gaol. Good day, sir."

And Burles, very much troubled in mind, went slowly on his way. "If Mr. Stone will not forget the ruffianism of a drunken man, I cannot hope to do much good with him," thought Mr. Martin, as he stood for a moment with his hand upon the knocker of the door.

He knocked—inquired for Mr. Stone, senior, and sent in his card by the grave livery-servant who had appeared at his summons. In a few minutes the servant returned, and ushered him into the library, where were the father and son—the son at a desk writing busily, and the father in a long dressing-gown, pacing the room in a very pompous, measured manner. Both gentlemen shook hands with Martin, the curate returning to his desk the moment afterwards, with a "Pray excuse me, Mr. Chester," and consigning Martin to the care of the incumbent, who began about the weather.

Martin having responded to several origi-

nal remarks about the fine day, the prevalence of westerly winds, and the prospects of a first-rate harvest, prepared to break the ice. He was not sorry that the time of Mr. Geoffrey Stone was occupied, though hope told no flattering tale on the wooden visage of the incumbent.

"I have called, Mr. Stone, on a very painful errand, connected with the——"

"Services at St. Jude's, I suppose," said Mr. Stone, shortly.

"Precisely," responded Martin, with a slight inclination to take offence at the rapidity with which he had been snapped up.

"We expect a great many calls to-day on the same subject, Mr. Chester," observed the incumbent, more graciously; "and it is a subject on which we must necessarily be brief. I hope it is to offer our persecuted church your valuable assistance, that we are indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"My assistance to suppress any un-

seemly turbulence at St. Jude's you may rely on," replied Martin; "but I trust you will also allow me to suggest, Mr. Stone, a means to suppress at once the angry feeling rising in this town."

Mr. Stone, senior, frowned a little; but his son remarked from his desk—

"Any means consistent with our dignity, and the greater dignity due to the church, we shall be most happy to pay our best attention to."

"Thank you."

"What is it you suggest, Mr. Chester?" asked the incumbent, impatiently.

"A return to the simple form of prayer practised at St. Jude's for many years, or, at least, some modification of the decorations, and some little alteration in the ceremonies."

"I thought as much, sir," said the irritable incumbent, beginning to walk about the room in quick little jerks. "This is no new pro-

position, Mr. Chester. You really must know, my dear sir, that we have been harassed and annoyed by propositions of this nature for the last three months, at least."

"I do not lay claim to the discovery of reconciling the differences in your church, sir," said Martin. "A child might see the course—the only course—that lies open to pursue."

"The course of retractation?"

"Yes, sir."

"That of giving way, and sacrificing the rites due to God to the clamour of an ungodly rabble."

"No, sir, not to the rabble."

"To the rabble, sir, hounded on by a few obstinate men, amongst whom I regret to say is a partner in your firm."

"I do not seek to influence the religious opinions of Mr. Grimley."

"And yet you would influence mine. Pooh! how hot it is," cried the incumbent,

with a stamp of his foot; "Geoffrey, how can you bear all the windows closed this melting morning."

Crash, bang went the window, as it was roughly flung up by the incumbent.

"No, sir, I would not influence your opinions," said Martin, undismayed from returning to the point by Mr. Stone's abruptness; "for I cannot consider I have a right to discuss theology with those who have made it their life-study."

"My dear, good sir," cried the incumbent, with a little jump in the air; "what *have* you come to discuss, then?"

"Common sense."

"Common sense has nothing to do with it," cried the rector, verging on a shout.

"I agree with you," responded Martin, dryly.

Geoffrey Stone rose and shook himself, like one preparing for the contest.

"Will you allow me, Mr. Stone, to briefly

conclude this matter with Mr. Chester?"

"Certainly, certainly, I have had quite enough of it. Good morning, Mr. Chester."

"Good morning, sir."

Mr. Stone bounced out of the room and went to his breakfast, in a frame of mind seriously calculated to damage his digestion.

"You will excuse Mr. Stone," said Geoffrey, politely; "we cannot always command our little infirmities of temper, and long years of ill-health have to some extent impaired my father's powers of self-control."

Mr. Chester bowed; Mr. Geoffrey Stone might consider his apology accepted.

"I have not time at present to enter into a full statement of our reasons for these improvements, or, as our enemies call them, innovations at St. Jude's, Mr. Chester. I shall have great pleasure in fully explaining them, at a time more fitting."

"Mr. Stone," said Martin, very firmly; "you will still misunderstand me. I do

not doubt your power to bring some evidence to prove you are in the right, as those who oppose you can produce their evidence to prove you are in the wrong—that is not the question.”

“What is?”

“I will ask you calmly and temperately the moral good of these improvements? I will put it to your conscience, as the minister of a gospel that proclaims peace, and goodwill, and teaches us humility, whether this be the right path you are following? Grant these floral adornments and crosses, these tapers and massive candlesticks, this substitution of altar for communion-table, to be based upon precedent, to be strictly rubrical—understand me, I have my own opinion on the subject—I will ask you, is it right to revive them all, and give offence to the majority for the sake of pleasing the few? Is all this show more necessary to salvation, than preaching the word of God in a way

acceptable to the many. Nay, if it wound the feelings and set men against each other, is it the real word of God at all?"

"It has made many converts—its followers are many. Mrs. Martin Chester is one of its brightest ornaments."

"Mrs. Martin Chester I believe, sir," said Martin, proudly; "whatever may be her admiration for the peculiar form of worship adopted at St. Jude's, whatever may be her own conviction as to the impression it makes upon her, or the deeper sense of religion it awakes within her, would be ready to sacrifice all to spare the church the unhappy dissensions that have risen in its midst."

"I believe Mrs. Martin Chester to have greater faith," said the curate, with a quiet smile.

This smile irritated Martin—it even smote his heart with a keen pang. *He* consider Mrs. Chester to have greater faith in his Tractarian doctrines; *he* express a belief in a

deeper knowledge of all that was passing in his wife's mind than he could do himself. Martin began to grind his teeth.

"The simple truth is, you advocate our submission to the mob—an acknowledgment that the blasphemous crowds who hustle us in our church and hiss us at our prayers, are right, and that we who have proof to back us in our worship are wrong and must submit. There is always danger in concession, but in such concession as you propose there is evinced no faith in God to support us in our trials."

"Your pardon, but faith in God is not shaken by the few concessions I earnestly advise."

"And which concessions I as earnestly deprecate; they are unmanly, cowardly."

"But not unchristianlike."

"I regret I cannot continue the argument, Mr. Chester," said the curate; "I have many calls upon my time this morning, and the hour is advancing. I must beg you to excuse me."

"Then, sir, the same practices that brought the church to the verge of a riot yesterday will be resumed next Sunday?"

"I shall not flinch from my duty for the sake of reverencing a mob."

"Then I cannot expose my wife to the chances of insult and injury."

"As you please, sir."

"Any assistance from myself to quell a disturbance calculated to do injury to the church, you may command."

"Thank you. I do not fear any danger. I am not of a timid nature."

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Chester."

And the two young men separated, each firm as a rock.

- CHAPTER III.

MARTIN EXPRESSES A WISH.

THE six days that followed Martin's conference with the Reverend Geoffrey Stone were as stormy as any Tenchester had seen. The incumbent and curate of St. Jude's were the principal topics of the day, and men in the market, over their shop-counters, in the streets and in their dwelling-houses, drifted into the one absorbing subject. Over parties of pleasure, country rides and rural picnics, the shadow of these two men seemed to hover, and friends who had gone forth rejoicing began to

argue and shake their fists in each other's face before the day was spent.

In those six days Iron Sam was transferred from the police station in the High Street to the county gaol on the outskirts of the town, there to ruminate on the evil effects of passion, and to think what he should do next to serve the parson out when the opportunity was offered him. Those six days witnessed a visit from the Bishop of the diocese, and a fight of the unwashed round the church gates and his carriage, to see him issue forth—witnessed the awfully depressing sight of the Bishop and the Reverend John Stone shaking hands on the threshold of that church, speeding fast, in Tenchester's opinion, to Romanism. Those six days witnessed the publication of Mr. Grimley's letter to the Bishop of Butterfield, and Mr. Stone's reply to Mr. Grimley's letter to the Bishop of Butterfield—brought the news of the action, *Stone v. Grimley*, and of its slow continuance, and of the intention

of either party who lost the day to apply to a higher court, and put his opponent to as much expense as possible. Those six days witnessed considerable hooting in the streets after Mr. Stone and son ; the latter gentleman appearing in Pleasant Street, and passing the " Peaceful Rest " twice-a day, at least,—witnessed an indignation meeting at the Sun Assembly Rooms, with Mr. Grimley in the chair, where votes of censure were passed, and Sneaking Jemmy spoke for three-quarters of an hour against Popery ; where Mr. Grimley was advised to lock up the church, to gut the church, to give the clergyman and his curate in charge to the police, and fifty other things that would have rather exceeded the power of the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the High Court of Parliament. A petition was drawn up that night to Parliament, and left at Ten-chester Library for signature, and was presented in due course to the Speaker by the Liberal member for the county, and was

stuffed into the usual waste-paper bag, along with petitions for Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, against Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, against Church Rates, for Church Rates, in opposition to the Income Tax, in favour thereof and the petitioners earnestly praying for an extra twopence in the pound!

There were services during the week at St. Jude's, at odd times and strange hours, that kept business men from prayers, and were little Tractarian reunions, where the Stones had it all their own way. Martin offered no objection to his wife attending service on those days, although it was rather hard to find Ada so often from home—to hurry away from the warehouses to his handsome villa, and then hear from the servants that Mrs. Chester had gone to church! He would have preferred home a little more like home, and Ada not quite so enthusiastic about a religion that was making everybody uncomfortable. Still

Martin did not care to express his preference to so good and devout a little wife; and by his side she was all love and tenderness, and seldom wearied him with a recapitulation of the excellent sermon, or the lovely anthems she had heard. He did not pain her even with the expression of his wish that she should absent herself from St. Jude's until the Sunday had come, and he and Ada were at the breakfast-table.

"Ada, my dear, I have a favour to solicit?"

"Indeed! Is it anything very important?"

"I think so."

"Pray, let me hear it, then. It must be a very great favour indeed that I can find heart to deny my Martin."

"It is supposed there will be a disturbance at St. Jude's this evening—possibly this morning. Every Sunday sees an increase in the irreverence and excitement of

the mob, and there is no telling when the flood-gates will give way and the church be desecrated. I cannot allow you to be a witness to such scenes."

"I do not heed them," was the quick reply; "and I must not neglect my duty to my God on account of your fear for myself."

It was an answer that reminded him of Mr. Geoffrey Stone — such an answer in nearly the same words the curate had given to his remonstrance on Monday last. There were some slight furrows on his high white brow as he said—

"Your thoughts are not with God in such a peril; you cannot think of the real motives for your presence there, with ribaldry and scoffing ringing in your ears. It is my wish that for a few Sundays you should remain at home, or attend some other place of worship."

"Will you not consider my wish a

little, Martin ? ” asked Ada, reproachfully.

“ Have I ever wantonly opposed it ? ” asked Martin ; “ is not my wish now for your good ? ”

“ Yes ; but why should I remain at home like a coward ? Do you think I am not as safe in my church as in my home, or that in the former all protection ceases ? ”

“ May I ask, Ada, if Mr. Stone and his son have not used those arguments lately ? ”

“ They have.”

“ They have pressed you not to flinch from your post, but hold on to your rites like brave Christians ? ” said Martin, satirically.

“ They have told us if we put no faith in God, we cannot expect to be strengthened ; and if we desert Him, we have sinned, and must answer for it on the Great Day.”

“ Do such men as these, in their blindness

and their wilful obstinacy, ever think for what evil they may answer when that day comes?" cried Martin, indignantly; "nay, even consider the true teachings of the Book on which they base their faith? Ada, you will believe I have thought of this a little, and that I can see no desertion of your Maker in attending for a short time a church where Divine worship is celebrated without mockery. I will attend at St. Jude's, for the sake of the decency due to any temple erected in God's service," he continued; "but I will not take one I love like you into danger. You are weak and impressionable, and the result may be serious; I have said it is *my* wish—if you respect my wishes, you will stay."

And Martin, disturbed in mind and temper, opened the glass doors, and walked into the garden, leaving Ada with the tears in her eyes at the breakfast-table.

It was the first time Martin had been

so very firm with her, and her heart felt a little heavy. She had vowed to love, honour and obey him, and she would obey him in all else but that which seemed to her like turning traitor to God. Besides, she reasoned, after a heavy shower of tears, he had not commanded her to stay; it was only his wish, and he had as much right to study her wishes as she his. The fear of a tumult did not alarm her in the least, and the more of true worshippers at St. Jude's the less likely for a tumult to arise. "Even one face missing at this particular crisis," Mr. Geoffrey Stone had remarked on Friday last, "he believed would be noticed by the lower orders, and reports spread that one more had left the church in disgust, and gone over to the opposite faction. Let them once have a fair ground for supposing the true followers were dividing amongst themselves, and the result will be a blow from which the church may never recover." Martin could not know

so much on that point as the minister, and she would enter into detail concerning Mr. Stone's arguments when her husband came in from the garden. She dried her eyes, and took courage ; she could meet that new, hard look of Martin's now ; she was certain that his love for her would soften his will, and bring her out of her trouble triumphantly.

Ada waited till the bells of St. Jude's began to ring out for church ; then she went to the window, and looked down the garden for her husband. Martin was not there, or his tall, manly figure had turned the bend of the path, and was concealed by the shrubs in the distance. She would see if she could find him. Tying her handkerchief over her fair hair, she tripped lightly down the steps, and hastened through the grounds in search of Martin.

What a fair summer's day it was!—how bright the roses and the lilies were, and how the bees were humming round them, and revelling in the sunshine. It did not seem a

day for angry recrimination—for husband and wife to quarrel, and never make it up! One could not believe in obduracy of will, and hardness of the human heart, on so bright a day as this. Ada remembered that day afterwards—a bright summer day, when roses and lilies bloomed, always awoke the reminiscence and filled her with sadness. It was not the day of her hardest trial, or her deepest grief; but she dated from it the germs of all the griefs, trials and temptations that swept upon her after-life. She could believe on that day the first blow was struck; and looking back at all the chain of circumstances that wound around her, she could see how, day by day, the axe fell upon the goodly tree of promise, until the noble branches which had sheltered her were level with the dust.

Martin was not in the garden. “Martin”—her quick thought suggested, as she sank on a rustic seat, and put her hands to her bosom to still its passionate heaving—“had gone to

church without her!" Her lips quivered, and the tears welled over again. Oh! she was very miserable! He had expressed his wish, but would not see how counter it ran to her own—would not wait for explanation, but had left her, with a contemptuous indifference to her feelings that he had never exhibited before. Ah! it was the old story!—the bloom was off the romance of wedded life, and all the golden fruit was withering. It had been so before with many as trusting as herself, and she was weak enough to fancy it would be with her an exception, and endure with her for ever. This was what Martin had called "sobering down"—neglect, disregard of *her* wishes, and the expectation of an uncomplaining obedience to his, were to follow that unhappy day.

Ada was a hasty woman, and the child of impulse. She sprang up with a look not unlike her husband's—with not a distant resemblance to Mr. Geoffrey Stone's when he glared

defiance at the Sabbath-breakers of a week ago. She would go—she *must* go!

The service had begun; Mr. Geoffrey Stone was at the lectern, or “lecturn,” as Chaucer hath it; and Martin Chester sat alone in his pew, when Ada came in pale and trembling. Martin Chester’s face for a moment changed to a deep red as he met his wife’s glance on entering—a glance that he could not read, and that seemed endeavouring to express so much. It told of resistance to his wishes, but of sorrow at the cause—of love and anxiety, and of a hundred emotions which at that moment he did not care to solve the meaning. He felt alone that his wishes had been considered secondary to her own; that he had asked her to keep away from St. Jude’s, and she had followed him and taken her place at his side—and that knowledge shadowed his face and compressed his lips.

It did not matter to Martin Chester that

the service passed off more quietly than usual ; that only a few scowling faces peered into the church, and a few of the opposition stood just at the entrance with their arms folded, and whispered to each other now and then, and shrugged their shoulders. It might be that resistance was growing weaker, and the black sheep of Tenchester were tired of wasting Sunday in church, and found even cursing therein monotonous. That was not the question now. *His* wish had been set aside, and Ada, for the first time in her life, had opposed her desire to his own. He was sorry and vexed at heart ; therefore his devotions were not of the purest. So full was he of the slight, that when Geoffrey Stone accidentally glanced towards his pew, the evil thought rose to his brain that the curate was watching him, and that Ada had been prompted to resistance. He had told Geoffrey Stone his wife should not attend St. Jude's, and this was Geoffrey Stone's answer and

defiance. Be it so; he would take up the gauntlet, and set his iron will against the curate's. Love might soften him, but defiance would render him adamant.

Martin offered his arm to his wife at the conclusion of the service, and escorted her out of church and homewards. He did not allude for a moment to her resistance to his will; he broached no topic of conversation, but he responded very politely, if not with his old tenderness, to every remark she hazarded.

Ada was puzzled, but she was quick to dart at conclusions; she began to congratulate herself on her manner of treating the question, and took Martin's scrupulous avoidance of the subject as a sign that he was sorry for what had happened at the breakfast-table, and in his contrition was disposed to forgive her first flat contradiction to his wishes. She read that the subject was to be for ever ignored, and things were to go on in

their old fashion as if nothing had happened. That was what her dear, sensible Martin meant; but she wished he wouldn't talk all on one note—like the intoning at St. Jude's; and she did not care about his extreme politeness. The afternoon might have decided all differences, and made them lovers again, had not Frank Chester dropped in to dine with them, and pass his afternoon in a brotherly manner. Ada was glad to see Frank, however; the presence of a third person, and one so dear to Martin, would help still more to give an amicable turn to affairs, and she did her best to bring about the result by her gracious smiles and cheerful manner.

So this young couple went on misunderstanding each other, and sowing the seeds of future misconceptions. Ada conceived Martin was anxious to shut out the unpleasant retrospect of the morning, and was beginning to feel happy; and Martin saw in Ada's man-

ner only a lightness and cheerfulness that told how little impression his words had made, and how contemptuously his authority had been regarded. Frank, the innocent third party, was in one of his best moods, and was more like the light-hearted young fellow of old than he had been since Margaret Cheyne had said NO to his love-suit. He was not an acute observer, and he took the ripples on the surface for a sample of all that was passing in the deep waters below.

Oh! that innocent third person, thinking little of the undercurrents of the life on either side, sitting between father and son, husband and wife, lover and betrothed, and knowing nothing of the inner workings of the hearts right and left of him—have we not each played his part in our time? We have taken our place between the troubled ones, and their smiles have deceived us; we have believed in their happiness, when misery was masked by a smile; and the goodly vessel

we have thought so secure was within an ace of the quicksand. Well, it is life, and life is a masquerade in which all true feelings are hidden. The author has not made a striking discovery.

Over an early tea at which Ada presided, Frank said lightly:—

“Do you know, I have come to protect sister Ada and you this evening, Martin?”

“My best thanks, Frank,” said Martin, “the protecting shadow of your wings may be of service to us. In what direction will the pinions be spread?”

“That of St. Jude’s.”

Husband and wife coloured.

“If there be not a disturbance to-night in holy quarters, it is very odd to me,” said Frank, more seriously; “and the assistance of all good men and true is necessary against the scum of Tenchester, and the half-men, half-brutes, who inhabit the blind alleys and narrow courts due east. I wonder who has

set these men on, Martin ; they have no conscience, no religious scruples — what is High Church to them ? ”

“ Great movements are always a mystery. ”

“ If I might advise my sister-in-law, ” said Frank, “ I would suggest her absence from St. Jude’s this evening. ”

“ Mrs. Chester follows no advice but her own, ” said Martin.

Frank took the remark as a jest and laughed heartily, and Ada could scarcely tell from the common-place tone in which the observation was delivered, whether her husband really intended any particular sarcasm. Perhaps he *was* jesting, and had rather admired her bravery than otherwise.

“ I do not fear a greater disturbance than usual, ” said Ady, “ and I—I *should* like to go, of course. ”

She looked wistfully at Martin, but Martin was stirring his tea, and deeply interested in the miniature whirlpool he was forming.

"Then you really mean to go, Ada?"
said Frank.

"Certainly."

"Well, Martin and I will do our best to take care of you; and as Martin sits here and says nothing, I presume his fears have not been aroused like my own. Perhaps, I am too suspicious—eh, Martin?"

"When women are reckless and dead to all warning, men's prudence would look too much like fear to be openly avowed. You see," with a faint smile, "I am a prudent man."

"Ye-es," said Frank; and for the first time a doubt crossed his mind if all were right in the house, or the heart of his brother. He was a wise man, however, and kept a still tongue in his head—he sought no man's confidence unasked; and Martin was a happy man, on whom troubles melted like a snow-flake. Just the ghost of a "tiff" had taken place between the husband

and wife—such tiffs will arise between the best regulated couples, but they are only mist-wraiths between themselves and the sun.

“Lady Cheyne and her daughter are going, I believe?” said Ada.

“Yes,” said Frank; “that is,” speaking less confidently, “they are always at their post, I understand. I trust no extra noise will disturb her ladyship’s nerves.”

“There was much less noise than usual this morning, Frank,” said Ada.

“Hum—that may be taken as a good or a bad sign, according to taste. In Mr. Stone’s place it would put me on my guard. But what a wretch I am, Ada, to needlessly alarm you.”

“I am not alarmed, Frank, in the least.”

“Well, so much the better. Perhaps I have too hastily deserted my own quiet little country church, to which the Tractarians have driven me, for head-quarters at St. Jude’s.

But the spirit of chivalry is strong within me."

"I am sorry to hear of your desertion from the church," said Ada.

"Or the church's desertion from its best interests? Confound it!" exclaimed Frank, knocking over a tea-cup in his vehemence. "Here am I—a lover of peace, and with a horror of argument—at the old game that has set the town by its ears. I cut a debater on Tractarianism as I would a man with the small-pox; and if I have not yet caught the Tenchester complaint, I don't like my symptoms. I am dumb, Ada. Every one to his own opinion, and free will for ever! There are the bells!"

Ada rose, and looked towards Martin once more. She was anxious he should follow her, if only for a moment, to express his wish again — a wish that, spoken earnestly, might incline her to give way. But Martin continued at the table, and she passed

from the room without meeting his glance.

Presently she came down again, dressed, and Martin asked quietly—

“Are you quite ready, Mrs. Chester?”

“Quite ready, dear.”

“We have ten minutes’ walk before us, and there may be some difficulty in getting to church if we are late. Now, Frank. This way, Mrs. Martin, if you please.”

CHAPTER IV.

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION.

THERE were signs of a storm that Sunday evening round St. Jude's, and Ada felt for the first time a sense of nervousness, as she, her husband and Frank, came within sight of the old church. A motley crowd had gathered round the doors, which were still closed though it was a quarter to seven, and the bells were clashing noisily. The crowd was impatient, and trampled on the graves, and knocked against the doors, and debated if it were law, and if any incumbent in the world had the power to keep the doors locked

in the face of the people after half-past six. Where were the churchwardens? Three cheers for Grimley!—here were the drab shorts coming round the corner. Three times three, and curse the constabulary, which stood in the churchyard, and formed a goodly muster in the streets. Why were the sovereign people coerced by this show of legal force? Three groans for the constabulary, and the Pope of Rome, and the Reverend John Stone and son, and the sexton, and the beadle!—or whosoever's duty it was to open the church doors to thirsting Christians. Three cheers more,—it is the right cause! God defends the right, and if any one tries to shove us out of our place, smash him! Freedom of opinion for ever, and down with the Puseyites!

“I think we had better pass through the parsonage, Martin,” suggested Ada.

“I am not aware there is a right of way in that direction.”

"We have Mr. Stone's permission."

"Ah! I am not learned in all the rules of this secret society," said Martin, in a bitter aside, that was not heard by his brother.

Ada felt at that moment that beneath the calm demeanour of her husband—that demeanour which had even deceived her, who thought she knew him so well—lurked the fire and the ashes of a volcano. Did she feel then that the fire might burst forth some day, and the ashes for ever afterwards strew her path in life?

They passed through the parsonage wicket, at which one or two rough-looking fellows were standing, and by whom they were informed that they were cowardly Puseyites, sneaking like foxes into their holes; and only wait a bit—that's all!

At the door of Mr. Stone's house they met Lady Cheyne, with two hands on her forehead.

"Oh! how do you do?—Oh! my poor

nerves, such spasms in the head, like red-hot wires stirring up the brain-pan. Hope you are quite well, Mr. Chester, and Mrs. Chester too, and Mr. Frank—dear me, what a time it is since I have seen *you* at Haselton House. Oh! these dreadful people; we must keep firm—firm though, and show no fear.”

“We must make haste, and secure our sittings,” said Frank; “if the people be once admitted, our title to possession will not be very reverently regarded. Will you allow me, Lady Cheyne, to ——?”

“Oh! dear, no. I am going home—not that I suffer from any alarm, but my brain-pan—the nerves in my weak, afflicted, brain-pan. I wouldn’t make a sensation by going mad in the church, for the wealth of worlds, Mr. Chester.”

“But—but Miss Cheyne?” asked Frank, in a hesitant manner.

“She’s a brave girl, and I like the Cheynes to show a spirit with the rest. She is in her

pew, and I shall send my carriage for her after the service. It's waiting round the next street now; for I felt my nerves going directly I reached Tenchester, and thought it advisable to make every precaution."

There was another shout from the mob—a cry that the people were breaking down the doors, and Frank looked hastily round.

"Excuse me," he cried, and then ran into the clergyman's house, and through a side-door into the garden, with considerable alacrity. Leaving Lady Cheyne, who declined assistance or escort, patting her forehead under the porch, Martin and his wife passed into the house, the threshold of which was carefully guarded by a policeman, and two strapping men-servants of Mr. Stone.

In the hall they encountered the incumbent, looking a degree more pale, and half-a-dozen degrees more obstinate, than usual. He seemed pleased at the appearance of Martin

and his wife, and received the former with considerable graciousness.

"I was afraid from our Monday's interview that you would desert us, Mr. Chester."

"No, sir," was the brief response.

"You are very late. Our followers have nearly all arrived, and I think we may venture in half a minute to open the doors. This persecution is very dreadful, Mrs. Chester!"

Mrs. Chester assented.

"But we shall live it down—we shall live it down!"

He turned to two more late arrivals, and Martin and his wife followed in the wake of Frank, and went silently and thoughtfully through the garden grounds to the back of the church and the vestry door, at which the beadle, with a strong determination of blood to the head, was mounting guard.

Mr. Grimley came puffing and blowing towards the vestry, at the same moment, and,

looking daggers at the beadle, exclaimed—

“What’s the meaning of this unjustifiable proceeding? Who gave orders to keep the church doors locked in this disgraceful manner?”

“Mr. Geoffrey Stone, sir.”

“Don’t Geoffrey Stone me, sir! He has no authority to act thus; and if any disturbance arise through this unjustifiable proceeding, Mr. Stone shall answer for it! He—he will—ah, Martin, my dear lad!—you’ll help us to keep order, if necessary? You will pardon me, too, but I would not have induced Mrs. Chester to accompany you to-night.”

“It was *Mrs. Chester’s* wish.”

“It is not yet too late—” began Grimley.

“It is much too late, sir.”

They passed into the church, already three-quarters full with the adherents of Mr. Stone, and Martin saw at a glance how few ladies had attempted to brave that evening’s storm.

He looked round the church for Frank, and saw him in Lady Cheyne's pew, seated at the door thereof, at some distance from Lady Cheyne's daughter. Union was strength, and he resolved to resign his own pew and join his brother and Miss Cheyne. Martin and his wife had scarcely done so, and taken their seats, when the doors were unfastened by the churchwarden's orders, and the crowd of men, women and children poured into church, and tumbled over one another in their anxiety to secure the vacant places. Many shrieks, many oaths escaped from the mass in this struggle; and Ada tremblingly bowed her head, and prayed for enlightenment and conversion to the wild crowd seething round her. Frank, stern and resolute, stood at the pew-door, and put back with a strong arm those who would have forced themselves in—even sent reeling on to his neighbours a little hump-backed man of the name of Jemmy, who tugged at the door, and seemed determined to enter.

The body of the church soon presented a dense mass of heads, and the noise and cries became terrific. Pandemonium might have rivalled such a scene of mockery—nothing else.

It is needless to state that the prayers of the Reverend John Stone received but little attention from the mob, and that certain portions of the intonation were greeted with roars of laughter, as though the incumbent had been overflowing with facetiousness. Talking, laughing, ribald jesting, even the coarse oath and the obscene speech filled the church of God with shame ; and Mr. Stone, undismayed by the uproar, continued his intoning, and flinched not from his work. Before the sermon, and whilst an elaborate hymn was being sung, the people mocked the choristers, travestied the words, and quarrelled amongst themselves. When the Reverend Geoffrey Stone took his place in the pulpit a volley of abuse greeted his appearance, and the words of "Puseyite" and "Papist" mingled

with some loud inquiries for a gentleman missing of the name of Burles. "What have you done with Sam Burles—who locked up poor Sam Burles?"

Geoffrey Stone coolly waited for some slight cessation to the storm; then he began his sermon, and turned his attention especially to the rioters. It was a sermon intended alone for them—a vigorous, powerful sermon, showing the enormity of the crime they were perpetrating, and for which they would have one day to answer. He had hoped great things of that sermon; it had cost him much of study, much even of prayer, and he had hoped to date from it a great change in the distressing condition of his church; but when he had looked down from his pulpit on the crowd of faces beneath, all his hopes sank at once, and he knew he had studied, prayed in vain. He did his best, but an angel standing in his stead might have preached as hopelessly. The men had come there for

a riot, for revenge—a few fanatics amongst them from conscientious motives, and labouring under the delusion that an indignant protest against Tractarianism would uproot the heresy—but very few for the sermon of Mr. Geoffrey Stone. To all his well-rounded periods, and burning phrases, and real natural eloquence, came back the scoff and the jest; and when he talked of the day when each who had come to desecrate the sanctuary would have to answer for the sacrilege, they shouted back warnings upon him who had been the cause of all. The noise increased so at this juncture, that Mr. Geoffrey Stone's voice was rendered inaudible, and the sudden giving way of a bench on which a dozen men were standing completed the confusion; men raved, women and children shrieked, hands swept off the gas-glasses, and one voice cried "Fire the church!" with a stentorian distinctness that blanched more cheeks than one.

Geoffrey Stone closed his sermon abruptly,

and dismissed his unruly congregation with his benediction; and, at a given signal, the police appeared, and proceeded to clear the church of rioters.

The people did not seem inclined to separate peaceably that night; they but changed the interior for the exterior of St. Jude's, and remained in a mass in the churchyard and round the entrance-gates, hooting and reviling the more decent members of the congregation.

"It is such men and women as these," cried sneaking Jemmy, when the brothers Chester came forth, escorting Ada and Miss Cheyne, "who support the evil by their purse and countenance, and leave it to their poorer brethren to protest!"

It was on Martin's lips to cry, "I have protested!" but he thought the same instant that it was not his place to seek to extenuate his conduct to the madmen thronging round him; so he passed with his wife down the narrow lane of people, and wisely kept his

silence. Better to be set down as Mr. Stone's adherent, than become a hero in the estimation of such vagabonds as these. Frank and Miss Cheyne followed silently behind Martin and his wife: their's was a peculiar position to be placed in, remembering what had passed when they had met last, but a strange fatality that night appeared to throw them together. Before they had left the church, Mr. Geoffrey Stone had come to the pew for an instant, and said to Frank—

"I need not ask you, Mr. Chester, to see Miss Cheyne safely to her carriage. I am compelled to remain, and protect the vestry for a few minutes longer, and the sooner Miss Cheyne is on her way to Haselton House the better. Margaret," said he, turning to her, "you are very pale. This has been a trial to you."

"I am better now, thank you."

"Good-bye," he murmured; "I leave you in good hands."

And, after saluting Martin and his wife, he retired to the vestry, leaving Frank Chester in charge of his old love. And now Frank Chester was in the street; the old love was on his arm, and he was shielding her from danger. He felt proud of his charge with all his sadness, and his heart thrilled with a dreamy mixture of happiness and sorrow very difficult to define. He thought he had shaken her completely from his mind—driven her from the inmost recesses of his traitorous heart; he could not understand it. Oh, yes! he had forgotten her, and could snap his fingers at his old feelings. He only felt a little strange, remembering their last meeting, and how it had ended with them both. He was a free man now, and she—she loved the curate of Tenchester!

There was some difficulty in finding the carriage, and a greater difficulty in accounting for the conduct of the coachman and footman, who were both talking at once, and shaking

their gloved fists at the crowd, and threatening the punishment of the law.

"You're the scum of the earth, and a paltry set of reptiles, that are only fit to crawl out of your holes to act these dirty tricks! I only wish I knew who'd done it!" cried the coachman.

"It's only because you're fifty to one you've got pluck enough to come here at all!" added the footman. "I'd punch the heads of half-a-dozen on you!"

"Bravo, calves!"

"I'd do it now, for two pins!" cried the coachman.

"Coachey for ever!"

"I'd"—the coachman stopped as he recognized his young lady and her escort, touched his hat, and said to Frank in a stage whisper—"You'd better take the young lady home, sir—I can't drive her. The blackguards have cut the reins and harness in half-a-dozen places. We can walk the horses slowly back, sir."

"I—I think I will get in the carriage," said Margaret, timidly.

"Better not, miss—you'd only be a mark for the mob," said the coachman; "and a stone's been through the glass of the carriage already."

"If Miss Cheyne will first accompany us home," said Martin, "I can drive her back in my chaise."

"I would not venture on foot," said Ada.

Miss Cheyne hesitated between her anxiety to calm her mother's fears, which she knew would be intense by this time, and her natural timidity at having Frank Chester for her escort. She knew she could trust his manly nature not to disturb her by a word; she did not wish even to pain him by declining his companionship, and the house of Mr. Martin Chester was half a mile on the opposite road. She would have preferred a change of partners, and Ada Chester left to the protection of her brother-in-law; but she

could not say so, and no one seemed to think of it, in the few moments of deliberation left for them in the midst of a turbulent crowd. For a moment the thought of returning to the parsonage, and putting herself under the guardianship of Geoffrey Stone, suggested itself; and then the fear of him being recognized and exposed to some cowardly attack deterred her once more. Frank himself settled the question.

"If Miss Cheyne can trust herself to my protection," he remarked, "I will see her safely to Haselton House. There is an unruly mob about the streets, but no settled mischief is intended; and I do not believe one of these people will think of intercepting our progress."

So Miss Cheyne and Frank went one way, and Martin and his wife the other—Martin promising to follow them after he had placed Ada in a position of security.

Frank and his fair charge were soon out

of the town, and in the moonlit green lanes, where all was peace, and where no sign of man's passions marred the landscape. Margaret Cheyne's hand trembled on his arm for the first few steps; she could not forget his excitement and passion on the day he spoke of his love for her; but her confidence returned at the first word he uttered—it was so kind, and so free from all emotion.

All the way to Haselton House he discussed the topics of the hour, with one subject he could have ever grown eloquent upon—held down and stifled. Not a word of the past, regretful or reproachful; not a single allusion to the old time when they were better friends, and he was vain enough to dream of her. A quiet matter-of-fact journey between two beating hearts—a quiet, matter-of-fact conversation, that kept the brain cool and the hand steady, and in which both affected an interest they did not feel.

If Frank Chester had had serious ideas

of "cutting out" the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, he could not have adopted a more effectual method. For Margaret Cheyne was grateful for his silence—and is not gratitude akin to love, as well as pity?

They talked of the riots at St. Jude's, too; and Frank was perplexed at the unembarrassed manner in which Margaret mentioned the name of Mr. Stone, and alluded to his doctrines. She could even object to the stubbornness with which he fought his battle.

"That he has convinced Lady Cheyne and me certain forms of worship show more reverence to the Most High, appears to me—perhaps only to me—no reason for the continuance of those forms when they bring such scandal on the Church. I would willingly resign them for charity's sake—for the sake of quenching this dreadful opposition."

"You must use your influence with Mr. Stone," said Frank.

“Mr. Stone is not to be turned from his own sense of what is right; and I suppose he knows so much better what that right is than we.”

Frank was inclined to doubt it, but he did not say so. He did not care to talk too much about Mr. Stone, either; that gentleman's name was always turning uppermost, and jarring on his nerves. Anything but Mr Geoffrey Stone—so he changed the topic to the brightness of the moon. Better the bright moonshine, than the ugly black shadow of the Tractarian.

They reached Haselton House without meeting a single interruption to their progress. Frank saw Margaret safely in the hall, shook hands with her, received her thanks for his escort, but respectfully declined intruding upon Lady Cheyne's nerves that evening.

He retraced his steps along the winding carriage-drive, and only halted when he had

bidden the lodge-keeper good night, and the lodge-gates had closed behind him.

Then he stopped and looked towards the white house gleaming in the moonlight through the trees, and wondered if his old love were happy. He would have liked to know how long her heart had beaten for the curate; he would have liked to look into futurity as he was looking through the trees, and see if happiness were waiting for her there.

A hand upon his shoulder startled him. His brother Martin was at his side.

"This is not a cure for your complaint, Frank."

"My complaint was cured some weeks ago."

"Is not this star-gazing symptoms of a relapse?"

"No," said Frank, sturdily; "I have shaken love from my heart, and with it the hope and despair that preceded and fol-

lowed it. I don't want to shut her from my memory though, Martin, and it will do me no harm to think of her now and then."

"To think of her as she is not, with a halo of romance false as all meteors are—encircling her and deceiving you—possibly not. Better the vision bright in the distance, than a reality at your side, that proves the folly of dreaming."

"What is wrong?" asked Frank, as they commenced retracing their steps.

"Wrong?" repeated Martin—"oh, nothing."

"The words of the cynic fall too seldom from the lips of Martin Chester not to betoken something strange. Still, old camarado," laying his hand for a moment on his shoulder, "do not confess to me all *your* visions have faded, for I will not believe it. There's a bright morning will follow every dark night of yours."

"I hope so," said Martin, moodily.

"I am sure so."

"I shall not trouble you with my confidence, Frank," said the elder brother; "I regret, in the bitterness of my heart, my hasty tongue dropped a hint of what was passing within. There are some troubles that are sacred even from brothers."

"True."

"Mine is what most people call a little trouble; but I am fool enough to feel it like a great one. Just a straw in the way of my wedded bliss, which robs me of my chance of the Dunmow fitch, Frank."

"What, a little misunderstanding between you and Ada!" said Frank; "and does that make you a Knight of the Woful Countenance? Why, between two such lovers as you—for you *are* lovers still—the smiles cannot keep long in the background."

"No, no;" and then, vexed with himself at having been weak enough to allude to the subject, he said, "What is your opinion of Mr. Stone's sermon this evening?"

"Oh, dear, Mr. Stone again!" inwardly ejaculated Frank; but, notwithstanding, he expatiated on Mr. Stone and that evening's discourse as though no topic could have been selected to which he could have more heartily responded. The subject soon died out, however, and they fell into their own trains of thought, and walked on together silently. They passed the carriage of the Cheynes coming slowly up the road, the footman and coachman at the horses' heads; they turned Wingfield Corner, and they entered after a time into the town, where the excitement having partially subsided, only a few noisy stragglers were left about the streets.

"I think I'll return with you, Martin,

if you have a decent supper to offer a hungry mortal," said Frank, as Martin halted at the beginning of the road leading towards his villa.

Martin detected the *ruse*; and, though the offer of mediator pleased him, he replied—

"No further out of your way, Frank. Ada has already gone to her room, and I am inclined to be dull company this evening. I shall bid you good night here."

"Good night."

Martin was on his road homewards, when Frank overtook him again.

"Martin, I have a bit of advice to give you."

"Will it take long?"

"No. It is couched in a few words, and in the form of a homely proverb. It is a business proverb, but it will suit affairs of the heart with which business has little connection, equally well."

“ Proceed, then.”

“ ‘Short reckonings—especially between husband and wife—make long friends.’ Advice gratis between the hours of nine and ten P.M. Good night, old fellow.”

Martin thought of Frank’s advice the rest of the way to his villa ; it was wise counsel, but he shook his head as he walked. What was the good of a short reckoning in this case ?—his duty was to reprove her for wilful disobedience ; he could not speak of love and forgiveness—that was *her* place. She had abused his confidence, and it was not his place to take the first step towards reconciliation. He loved her better than anything in the world ; but he would not show himself a child even to her who lay next his heart. Kindness, a mild expression of his wishes, had been treated with something like defiance, and—whispered that devil always

at our ear when anger is in our heart—she had no fear of *his* rebukes, for that Sunday afternoon she had never been in better spirits.

Frank, retiring from his lost love, had halted before Haselton House for a few last thoughts: Martin, advancing to his wife—not a lost love yet, thank God, if he kept firm!—halted too, and marshalled his ideas.

He thought of his own words to Frank, too, before he opened the great gate, and went up the path.

“Better the vision bright in the distance than a reality at your side that proves the folly of dreaming.”

Had the reality come to him, and were his eyes opening to the cruel daylight wherein no visions could live?

CHAPTER V.

CONFESSION.

MARTIN took not the advice of brother Frank. He was quite willing to make short reckonings, but his pride would not allow him to take the initiative. He left it to the weaker vessel—and the weaker vessel, knowing not how one word might affect him, held its peace. Ada was troubled, seriously troubled at the change in her husband, and strongly objected to those studied airs of politeness that had taken the place of those little fondnesses he was once partial to bestowing. They were

husband and wife now, and not lovers ; they never would be lovers again. They had settled down, and all the Loves and Graces and Fancies—rosy evanescent children, born for summer and sunshine—had spread their gauze wings, and flown to happier homes. She had told him at Paris that it would come to this ; but she had scarcely believed it, looking into that handsome face of his, and hearing his denial. And yet he was not unkind ; and if she took as much pains as possible to keep the subject in the background, this stateliness would wear off, and the old looks of Martin would peep from the mask.

Perhaps he was sorry that he had tried to influence her religious views, and was anxious for the calumet and the kiss of peace, and the final burying of that dreadfully sharp hatchet that had chopped away so much of her happiness. She assumed a more cheerful air under that impression ; but Martin's

smiles were glassy, and if there were any difference in his manner, it was to be a trifle more frigid. He did not care for her forgiveness, she thought next, why should she make any further advances, when they were received with such coldness? She was ready to run to his embrace, and be better friends than ever; but he held her at arms' length, and would have none of that affection he had once told her could alone make him happy. She did not think for a moment of the one word, the one promise, that Martin required, before the ice in his breast melted away; and Martin, foolish man, thought she knew it too well, and would not bend even for him.

So the world of this couple became hard and prosaic, and they were as separated by the one word as by a gulph that no love could bridge over. Weeks passed thus; and that cold manner of one, imitated at last by

the other, which had been begun with great effort, and now set upon them as if natural to their habits, gathered strength every day, took different but darker shadows, and brought with it that usual train of mistakes and misconceptions—of facts ever misunderstood because never explained—that has been the shipwreck of homes as full of promise as theirs.

Martin Chester went early to business and came back late—he was in no hurry to seek the side of his wife now; his face became more pale, and the stern decisive expression that he kept for his business in troubled times was brought to the home, and looked there like the skeleton's head at the feast of the Egyptians. Ada, left alone, turned for consolation to religion; her deep religious feelings had power to comfort her, to strengthen her even to bear the loss of her husband's heart, slowly, surely sinking away from her!

She never missed a service at St. Jude's now ; and St. Jude's was open very frequently—the zeal of the incumbent and his son knowing no diminution. Her efforts to forget her sorrows in religion were set down by Martin to repeated violations of his wish that she should attend a less showy place of worship ; to a something that contracted his brows and steeled him more and more—it was so very like bravado. A hatred of the curate of Tenchester began to take possession of his breast. Martin had never loved Mr. Stone's stubbornness, his creed, his faith in pomp and vanity ; but when this man had been the means of depriving him of his happiness—when that man's society was sought day after day, and his own distaste for Tractarianism was met by a fanatical devotion to it on the part of his wife, he must hate him, innocent though he might be of one thought of marring his felicity.

Martin went to church regularly of a Sun-

day, for his wife's protection ; they walked together arm in arm, they talked together in their peculiar grave way, and no one guessed that the blight had fallen on the hopes reared in trusting times. Frank had departed to London on business for the firm, or the pale face of Ada and the stern lined countenance of Martin might have told him that the advice he had one night offered, had gone the way of all good, sensible advice, and been offered to the winds.

The reader must not suppose that Martin Chester, with all his firmness, did not waver now and then—did not approach so near to the line of demarcation that Ada's heart beat wildly with all the old rush of love ; must not even suppose that his affection was more weak because his powers of endurance were strong. More than once he stood hesitating on the verge of his own resolution, resolved to seek all explanation, and know the worst or the best ; and then a chance

remark on Mr. Stone's sermon, a chance word from his wife, that implied to his diseased mind an indifference to his wishes, sent the heart back to its solitude, and locked the door against all tenderness.

Meanwhile the riots continued and increased in violence, and nothing came of them but long letters which passed between bishop and churchwarden, churchwarden and incumbent, incumbent and bishop, and left matters a trifle more foggy than heretofore.

Busy and absorbed as he was in the duties of his religion, the Reverend Geoffrey Stone was the first to detect the great change in Mrs. Chester, and allude to it. He had been struck with the bright looks of the bride when he met her first at Haselton House, and thought what a happy-looking face she had ; and he was too keen an observer not to detect the new marks

of sorrow and care. He had also remarked that she was one of the most regular attendants at St. Jude's—that night or morning, rain or sunshine, she was in her pew a few feet from his pulpit, and listening breathlessly to his eloquence. He was a servant of God, but he was man enough to feel flattered by her attention; and when he began to mark, day after day, some change for the worse in her looks, he was interested to discover the reason. She was one of the faithful of his flock; and if any advice that was in his power to give could lighten the load he knew was at her heart, it was his duty to offer it—it was the duty of all those having a care for their sheep.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “some of the great truths of religion remain yet a mystery to her, and a word of mine can dissipate the clouds of error. I have no right to hesitate.”

So, one Wednesday morning, when the sermon was over, when the few week-day worshippers had gone, and Mrs. Chester sat still with bowed head, as if in prayer, Geoffrey Stone changed his gown and appeared at the door of her pew.

She started when she rose and became aware that the curate was waiting for her, and she coloured a little beneath his searching gaze.

"Mrs. Chester, I fear I am going to ask you what may be considered a rude question, but which I think you will set down to its rightful motive — the pastor's care and duty."

Ada drew her veil down to hide the emotion on her varying face. The words were very kind and gentle, and came from one she believed the holiest and best of men. She had not heard kind or gentle words lately, and they filled her eyes with tears.

No response coming from Mrs. Chester, the curate of Tenchester continued—

“Any doubt or trouble from which your mind may suffer—any religious doubt or trouble that may be unnecessarily distressing you—I trust you will allow me to remove, if possible.”

“My troubles are home troubles, Mr. Stone—of the world, not of the church.”

“A clergyman’s duty is in the world—it has a wide range, and embraces all the worldly cares that disturb the soul of the believer. A clergyman is of the world—takes his part therein, seeks, whilst preparing the sinner for a better one, to smooth the roads of this. He helps the pilgrim to sustain his burden cheerfully—even shares it with him when the load grows heavy, and the sinking soul is inclined to linger by the wayside. Mrs. Chester, yours is no light trouble.”

“No, sir.”

"The world itself has cures for the cares of the frivolous, but not for cares like yours. May I ask you to confide in me, to trust to my advice? I feel assured you will not regret confessing your sorrows to me."

"Confessing?" murmured Ada.

They had been walking slowly down the aisle, and had reached the entrance-doors. They stopped there, and after a moment's hesitation turned and walked down the church again.

"The canons of our Church authorize, in peculiar cases, the confessions of the afflicted, give us power to console them in their trouble, and solace them with godly counsel. We do not seek the outpourings of the heart, but we are not bound to reject them."

Ada hesitated still, despite his assurances. The name of Confession startled her; and yet how she longed to pour out her soul to some one who would sympathize with her

affliction, perhaps show her the way to win back her husband's love.

"I—I thought Confession was an article of faith confined to the Church of Rome, Mr. Stone?"

"Ours is not the Romish confession—I hope you do not think that. It is not in my power to absolve you from sin, Mrs. Chester—only God's help can do that," he said; "but still I think I may advise you profitably. The benighted sneer at us and call us Jesuits for this holy practice, but there are few clergymen who are not called upon to hear the sins and the sorrows of some unfortunate member of their flock. Even the Wesleyans form their Select Society or Band for mutual confession. 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed,' is the text they consider sufficient authority for the practice."

Ada was weeping; her heart was troubled and excited. Could she turn away from this

one friend? Who was more calculated to listen to her griefs, and give her strength to bear them, than the pious and persecuted man at her side. It was a false step—a grave step; but it was made. In a room attached to the vestry, seated on a low stool almost at his feet, in the attitude of a suppliant—the worthy Mr. Stone admired form and ceremony—the young wife poured forth the secret of her misery, sacred as it should have been to God and her husband. Amidst the heavy convulsive sobs that shook her frame and choked her utterance, Geoffrey Stone learned the history of her serious misunderstanding with Martin Chester, and strove, to the best of his ability, to indicate the *right* path for her pursuance. It was sound doctrine he taught her—the doctrine of submission; he took the common-sense view of the question, and his keen perception saw at once that a full explanation between husband and wife was the only thing likely to save

them many future years of misery. Geoffrey Stone, it seemed, could advise giving way in cases not resembling his own.

Ada was recovering from her sobs, and feeling happier and more brave, and the curate was still discoursing eloquently, when the door was pushed open, and Mr. Grimley, with an amazed expression of countenance, stood on the threshold.

"God bless my soul, Mrs. Chester! Dear, dear me, Mr. Stone, what is the meaning of this?"

"What is the meaning of this intrusion, sir?" asked the curate, almost fiercely.

"I have a right to intrude, sir, as churchwarden of St. Jude's," cried the hot-tempered gentleman; "I have a greater right to intrude, now St. Jude's is exposing such sad mysteries. Mrs. Chester, may I ask if this confession to a Protestant minister—to the young and accomplished curate of Tenchester—meet with your husband's approval?"

"That question I will answer my husband—not my husband's partner."

"Very well, madam. You will understand me, that should that question not be answered within four-and-twenty hours, it will be my painful duty, for the sake of my partner's happiness, to inform Mr. Chester of all that I have witnessed here."

"I have no more to say, sir."

"Leave the room, sir!" exclaimed Geoffrey Stone, pale with passion—"I command you!"

"I 'shall not leave the room, sir!" cried the churchwarden, jumping with both feet in his vehemence; "and I am not here to obey your wishes, sir, but to frustrate most of them. If you lay a finger on me, I'll have you up for an assault."

"Let me pass, Mr. Grimley," said Ada, with an agitated voice; "pray, do not let me add to any ill-feeling by remaining. Good morning, Mr. Stone. Do not think me ungrateful for your kind advice, your

fatherly counsel, that I thank you now so coldly. I must hasten home—I must see Martin.”

“The fittest one from whom to seek advice, Mrs. Chester, I assure you.”

The curate did not deign a reply to this insinuation; the pause had enabled him to master his passion, and become his former self. He took up his hat and followed Mrs. Chester, who was hurrying down the aisles.

The churchwarden looked after him, fidgeted from one foot to the other, finally drew forth a voluminous silk-handkerchief, and began to blow his nose and wipe his eyes, and choke a little in his throat.

“So it has gone as far as this!” he said, at last; “this is the secret that has changed my old friend’s son so much! Poor misguided woman!—poor Martin!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEGINNING OF A STORM.

EVEN a minister of the Church of England may study appearances to some extent, without falling under the censure of living for the world, and seeking good opinions amongst men. Mr. Geoffrey Stone, conscious of the purity of his motives, did not care to explain them to society. He might have done a wiser thing than hurry after Mrs. Chester; he might have remained with Mr. Grimley, and condescended to enlighten that gentleman, as to the chapter of accidents that had brought him and Mrs. Chester together

in the "confessional." He might have touched the crotchety old man's heart—it was not hard to thrill, if the key-note were sounded carefully—by a recapitulation of Ada's struggle with her better self, of Ada's sickening sense of despair at the light of her husband's love being suddenly shut from her. The story told by Ada Chester had moved *him*, and Mr. Grimley's heart was no more of the nether millstone than his own.

However, he flung up the chance of seeking a friend in Mr. Grimley, and enlisting him in the young wife's cause; he had seen Mrs. Chester's faltering progress up the aisle, observed her stop once suddenly, clutch at the back of a free-seat for support, and then go on again, and the instinct of the gentleman prompted him to follow her and offer her his escort. He overtook her at the churchyard gates.

"Mrs. Chester, you are very weak; to

day's excitement has been too much for you. Let me beg of you to take my arm, until you have recovered your composure."

Ada thanked him, and took his arm mechanically. They walked out of the town, and slowly down the country road, towards the house of Martin Chester.

"You must not let the rudeness of Mr. Grimley disturb you," said Geoffrey; "or his coarse threats shake you in your duty."

"No, no, I shall not give way again, Mr. Stone," she replied; "but, oh! how hard it is to have every action seen in a false light!"

"We should not grow weak because our actions are misconstrued," said he; "that is to prove our want of faith in Him who sends the trial to us. Standing firm on the rock, we have no right to feel helpless."

He set his teeth, and clenched one hand, and looked sternly at the distance; he was

not thinking of Mrs. Chester then, but of the opposition that had swept at him like a sea, and which he had resisted as the iron-bound cliff resists the mad dash of the waves. Yet there are cliffs over which the sea wins the victory, as there are cliffs that for centuries have resisted the foe. Precaution may save the rock from its fate; but to stand sullenly in the midst of the storm, making no effort, seeking no help, and offering but to the deadly dash of the enemy its own stubbornness and pride, is to fall!

Mr. Stone continued discoursing, but Ada was inattentive. She could not shut from her mind the hard words of her husband's partner, and she secretly felt that all was not proceeding well. And yet she had trusted implicitly in the minister; and in whom could she trust—to whom could she turn for advice—if not to those great physicians of the soul, whose place is to comfort and help?

Poor Ada, in her innocence, could not

think there might be error of judgment, and weakness of spirit, in the heart of the Church itself: she had been brought up with a reverence that required something greater than the clamour of a mob to shake.

"I will not take you further out of your way, Mr. Stone," said Ada, at length. "I am quite strong now."

"Strong in your purpose to seek a full explanation with your husband, as well?"

"Yes."

"You must remember all your future happiness is centred in him, when the will to resist becomes strong."

"Yes, yes! I have been wilfully blind, and you have saved me. I will seek my husband out—I do not fear him now!"

A hard, grating voice at her ear made her start.

"The husband should feel complimented, though he may find it difficult to remember

much exhibition of fear on the part of his wife."

Martin Chester was at their side, and his face was very stern and livid in the sunshine that day. The curate raised his hat, but Martin only responded to the courtesy by a short toss of the head. Geoffrey Stone read a good deal of what was passing in Martin's mind; and for the wife's sake—not his own—he condescended to explain.

"Mrs. Chester was ill and weak when she left church this morning. I considered it my duty to see her home, or in safe hands."

"Do you consider her in safe hands now?" was the blunt query.

"Certainly."

"You are *quite* sure that consistent with your duty to God and other men's wives, you can entrust Mrs. Chester to my care?"

Mr. Geoffrey Stone took a few more inches to his stature, and looked coldly—almost contemptuously—at Martin.

“You hear me, sir! Am I not worthy a reply?”

“Your question was unworthy of yourself, Mr. Chester. Do not ask me to reply to it?”

“I will ask you, then, very humbly—very respectfully—with a deep sense of the reverence due to so great a man—to leave Mrs. Chester to my care.”

Mr. Geoffrey Stone left the side of Ada, and said—

“To your care, sir, I commend her. Of a want of care, I warn you!”

“Don’t warn me, sir! I am no more than a man, and a man will meet an insult with a blow, sometimes!”

“I have no intention of insulting you,” replied the curate; “and I can but regret your unnecessary violence. It appears to me that you are labouring under some delusion; and if so, for Mrs. Chester’s sake—even for your own—I ask you, before we part, for a fair,

frank explanation? I will return you one, if you require it."

"I require nothing from Mr. Geoffrey Stone, but his absence," said Martin. "I can put no trust in him."

"Martin—dear Martin!" said his wife, imploringly.

"At your request I spare *your* friend my taunts, madam. Will it please you to accompany me?"

He offered Ada his arm, and she placed her trembling hand upon it. Mr. Geoffrey Stone raised his hat again, and then retraced his steps towards Tenchester. He turned when he had proceeded some fifty or sixty yards, and looked back at the husband and wife walking silently, slowly, in the opposite direction. Neither of them was speaking; the wife was looking at the white dusty road; her head was bent, and she was weeping. Martin, with his head flung back, was glaring straight before him,

and Geoffrey knew the livid face was setting as sternly as though the shadow of death were on it. It would look so in the hour of a great trouble, or when life had fretted out of him—it would look so in his coffin.

“God strengthen her, and teach him what is right and just,” he murmured; “this is a strange world! Well for us all that when it ends, the true life begins!”

CHAPTER VII.

A VIAL OF WRATH.

AT the same slow rate, and in the same silent manner, went husband and wife to their home. Walking together up the garden path, did it strike them with what hopes they had proceeded on it first?—with what love, and pride, and confidence the wife had leaned on his arm, and looked at the home he had prepared for her? They were to be always happy there; they had married for love, and there was nothing to stand in their way.

Ah, miserere! — that was only a few

months ago; the landscape had brightened since, there were flowers blooming round them, and a hundred feathered choristers had replaced the little robin who had hopped before them on the lawn. But there were flowers blooming in their hearts then, and now they were lying in the dust!

Slowly and silently towards the house, and into the richly-furnished drawing-room, Ada gathering strength by the way to meet the coming storm. She had suffered much that morning; the flood-gates of trouble had been unloosed, and she had nearly been engulfed by the waters; but she felt her courage to rebut an ungenerous suspicion, and her pride slowly awaken at the dawn of distrust. If he had only waited for her story then, in lieu of beginning his own; if the ice had been thawed by the warmth of his tenderness, instead of the heat of his own passions, what a different

tale this might have been! But the fire within him had been smouldering so long; for many weeks it had required to be pressed down and buried, for every sign of it to be hidden from those who had watched him and wondered if he were ill—who even asked the question, and were shortly and unthankfully responded to.

Ada, white as the blind drawn before the window to screen Martin's portrait from the sun, dropped into a chair by the empty fire-grate, and Martin stood upon the rug before her, with one hand fidgeting at his neckcloth, as though it were stifling him.

"Mrs. Chester, I have seen my brother Frank to-day."

It was a remark so unexpected, that a gleam of light fell on Ada's path, and she looked up quickly. It might not be so cruel a suspicion of her, she thought—until she saw that ashen face, and met those strange, wild eyes.

“He is a good brother—I have found that out to-day. Until to-day I have never known his real value, or estimated him at his sterling worth. We had not met for many weeks, and in our brief interview something in my looks awoke his solicitude, and made him at once the real friend, the best adviser, the true brother. He did fearlessly what I would have struck to the earth another man for doing ; he probed a deep wound, laid bare much of my own folly, and showed me how blindly I had been groping in the darkness. It was of our long estrangement we spoke, Mrs. Chester ; and in the fulness of his heart, in his implicit confidence in you, and in his desire to bring us back to the old life, he sided with you against myself, and defended your cause so justly, that I gave way, and wept. Stay, madam,” he cried, as Ada sprung with an upward movement towards him — “retain your seat. I have not finished—I have not half finished !”

Ada sank back again: a blow from him could not have done it more effectually than the glance of those cruel eyes.

“My brother spoke of the growth of an evil purpose;—how fast it grew, and what deep roots it struck, and how weaker was the strength to combat it every day! He thought my silence was evil, and was working evil; and he begged me, with his whole soul, to come to you at once, and prove myself the husband who had vowed to love and honour you till death. He was assured that there was much on each side to explain, and that in that explanation all the mists of error would vanish away, and leave us standing hand in hand. I thought it might be so at last, and he and I were bitterly mistaken.”

“No, no!—I——”

“I demand your silence, Mrs. Chester, for a short time yet,” he interrupted. “I will not listen to a word, until I have ended this story of a man’s misplaced hopes, and

a woman's weakness and deceit. Let me say, I left Frank Chester full of better feelings towards you, and conscious of a purity of thought that I had not experienced since you bade defiance to my wishes. I came home to seek you—to relate all at once, and ask forgiveness for all—and you were absent. I went back to St. Jude's, and waited for you a little way from the church, madam. I heard the clock strike one, and saw from the bend of the road the people come forth, and scatter right and left; saw even the old beadle and the palsied pew-opener take their homeward road—and yet no Ada! If hope deferred maketh the heart sick, Mrs. Chester, must not the curse of despair, following close on the hope, collapse it with horror?"

He struck his hand upon the mantel-piece with a violence that shook the ornaments thereon against the glass, and brought the crystal-drops of a lustre clattering down into the fender.

“The hope had not died out when I was standing at the door of St. Jude’s, looking down the empty church, for there was doubt to re-assure me!—doubt of your not being at Lady Cheyne’s, or bargaining with the Tenchester shopkeepers—of your not being at home already. I turned away almost content, and hastened from the church—and in the streets of Tenchester the curse fell on me! I remembered Mr. Grimley mentioning, in the counting-house, that he had seen you enter St. Jude’s that morning, and his wish that it were a church more worthy of your constant attendance; and, remembering those words, I turned back once more in search of you. THEN I saw you for the first time! In your agitation and excitement you were unaware of the eyes that watched your trembling steps—I will not call them *lingering* steps!—and noted the curate’s approach, and the easy habitual way in which he offered his arm and you accepted it. If those watchful eyes

could only have blasted him with their lightning, they would but have fulfilled the desire of their owner!"

"Cease, cease!—this is awful!"

"If to express what I felt then is awful in the narration, even *you* may imagine what my sufferings were."

"Why should you have suffered so acutely?"

"I had begun to doubt you, madam."

"You had no right!" said Ada, warmly.

"I had a right—I have a right still, and it will remain there like a black devil between every thought and action, until thought and action be denied me in the grave. I repeat, I had a right to doubt you."

"I still answer No!"

She had risen with her cheek flushed, her delicate nostrils dilated, her proud bosom heaving like a sea. She could bear anything but his distrust of her honour—that was a deadly sin against her which smote away all

consideration for herself and him, and armed her to the teeth.

"I doubt you now. All my faith in you, in your respect for my love or my name, vanishes away over the brink, and leaves my trust a ruin!"

"Martin, I would have given my life for your's this morning—would have told you all, and even sued to you for pardon. I was returning, encouraged by good counsel and with renewed strength to do right, and you came between and stabbed me to the death. You have stabbed my heart, killed my respect for you, thrust me too far away ever to return to your side and consider you my husband. The grave you raved of a few moments since will not more effectually divide us than your own dastardly words; for that man is a dastard who, without the shadow of a proof, charges a woman with the greatest sin under heaven."

"Madam, I do not say that you have

sinned, but I still reiterate my doubt of your love for me, of your actions having been considerate or delicate. God and yourself only know how far a strange mystical infatuation has led you on the path seldom retraced in perfect innocence; but that you have strayed from your wifely allegiance, and turned your thoughts from home and husband, I know too well."

"I know that every word you speak is false!"

"Was I in dream-land when I saw you with Mr. Stone, then?"

"No, sir."

"Was it part of a mad dream to return and seek out Grimley, whom I had seen enter the church—demand all that he had witnessed and interrupted—to discover that evidently by arrangement you and the curate of Tenchester sat out the congregation, and then entered into earnest conversation together in the room near the vestry where my partner

found you—you excited and in tears? Let this be a dream, and I will die with joy to wake!”

“Live on in your dream, sir, heightened though it be by the false colouring of your friend.”

“He did his best to screen you.”

“Ada Chester’s character requires no screening, sir—the truth alone would have been sufficient to prove me guiltless of all wrong. You have turned traitor against yourself in distrusting me—you were too ready to make your own suspicions certainty to place credit in the purity of your wife. I do not ask you to believe me now—it matters little to me, and will affect little my future course, whether you place credence in what I say or not. My conference with the curate is true, but the evident arrangement for that conference is false. My excitement, my tears, I do not seek to deny; I was lonely and unhappy at home, and I needed comfort and advice.”

"He *solicited* that interview?"

"Yes."

"And you confessed what should have been sacred between us to a third party—a young man—one, against whom I was already prejudiced. You *confessed* to him!"

"Yes."

"Damn him!" shouted Martin, and the hand fell once more heavily amidst the ornaments upon the mantel-piece.

"You are mad, sir; midst the errors of your perverted mind, one gleam of common sense, of common justice, does not fall. Mr. Geoffrey Stone has acted like a minister of God—has proved himself a good and worthy man. It was he who wished me to——"

"I will not hear you plead for him—I hate the scoundrel. There is a day of reckoning between him and me, be he minister of heaven or hell. You confess to this juggling Jesuit, as a benighted papist to his priest, and shut your heart against

your husband. Am I a fool not to see where this will tend, and not to know where this will stop?"

"I will not hear more, sir!" said Ada, moving towards the door. He followed her and caught her by the wrist.

"Hear this, then go to your room with more sense of the wrong done me, and of the right that is due—with more humility and less defiance. There is a frail thread that still connects you to me; a word may divide it, but only complete submission coupled with time can strengthen it, and restore my confidence and love. It has come to a struggle between you and me for mastery; and when I have said 'It shall be,' it is a will of iron that knows no change. And I say this SHALL be, or the thread breaks between us, and all's over!"

He released her, and she moved on towards the door, where she stopped with one hand upon it, and the other on her surging breast.

He continued:—

“It shall be trust in me. It shall be your husband for the one confessor on earth. It shall be the last time your foot enters St. Jude’s under its present direction; the last time—so far as it is possible in a town like this—you see or speak with that false servant of God, Geoffrey Stone. Say ‘Yes’ to this, and I will not despair of happiness—say ‘No,’ and heaven help us both, for we shall need it!”

“I cannot trust a man in whom I have been deceived, and who covers me with shame at his ungenerous suspicions—I cannot leave a church in which alone I find that comfort denied me by my husband.”

“I will not consider this your answer,” he said; “I will come to your room an hour hence and seek it.”

“As you please, sir.”

“In an hour, you will understand we

begin a better life together — or a worse, I fear, apart.”

“My trust in my Maker bids *me* fear nothing.”

Ada went out of the room; and as the door closed, the strong, firm man whose will was of iron, knowing no change, flung himself on his knees before the chair she had quitted, and covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANSWER.

WHO is in the wrong, gentlest and acutest of readers—this firm man, or this poor woman? Who has the greater right to his or her own way, and who sees through the glass more darkly, and will have none of the light of truth to assist. I would not sow dissension among novel readers, though this be a novel written with a purpose, written in the vain hope of doing a little good, and, mayhap, founded—for who knows where these “writing fellows”

obtain their materials? — on some glimpses of a real home tragedy akin to this. I would not sow dissension amongst novel readers, I say, though I fear the masculine portion who may favour me by a perusal of this story will side with Martin Chester, as assuredly the ladies will with the object of his jealous sternness.

That being the case, the writer of this tale must mind what he is about, lest he offend a large portion of his constituents by claiming sympathy for Martin. Ladies form three-fourths of the great body of novel readers now-a-days; and even when business grows slack, those confounded Quarterlies, and those stately fictions yclept biographies, will interfere with us story-tellers, and get our pet works pooh-poohed.

Still, I must say Martin had fair ground for complaint; and if he put himself in too much of a passion, and showered down too large a heap of hard words, why you and

I have done so, reader, in matters of far less consequence.

We don't like the buttons off our shirts, or our pet collars and neckties missing; we express ourselves very forcibly sometimes to our sisters and wives. They may not go to confession, and their confessor may not be a handsome young man of three or four and thirty; but we can still be ungenerous in matters of less moment, and "rap out" pretty strong if needful.

Ah! ladies and gentlemen, IF we all knew the art of giving way a little better, just in the "nick of time," as the old phrase runs, this would be a world of less misfortune. There would be but little said then about High Church and Low Church, and more respect in the world shown for one another. Husband and wife, brother and sister, father and son, would be more chary of hard words, and less sparing of that affection which brightens the home and the

heart, and is the great gift of a Divine Hand—a gift which to neglect is to bring the blight to the bud, and the bud to drop off from the bough.

Turn we to this sorrowing, mistaken couple, ere the curtain of another act falls on them.

Whether Martin wept or prayed, or thought about all that had passed and might follow, it was difficult to conjecture from the still form kneeling by the chair. If he shed tears, they were silent ones, and unaccompanied by any of those convulsive movements of the frame, that, when a man gives way, shake him with so awful a violence. If he prayed, they were voiceless prayers uttered in the depths, and stirring not the echoes of that room; and if he thought, I do not envy him his current of ideas. It is possible tears, prayers, and thoughts might all have been combined in those despairing moments—standing on the brink of his fate,

and knowing that so many minutes hence his whole life might change, and all its past light die out and leave him dark.

Was it to be? Would she remain firm to the last, and prefer Geoffrey Stone and his teachings to his old love and her happiness? Yes—her happiness; he felt it would be shattered with his own, and that each would turn away firm and unwavering, to the blighted life lying beyond if she said, “No, it shall not be!”

He moved at last, and glanced for a moment at the portrait of his better self upon the wall. So little while ago since that was taken, and what a bridge between that man of the past and him, and what a gulf to span! Only a little while ago, in mortal computation, but to Martin years of mental anguish and of the bitterness of distrust since he had looked like that!

He rose, walked to the window, drew up the blind, and let in a flood of

light, and stood therein gazing at his fair garden grounds, cold and miserable. Once or twice he shivered as he stood there, and once he clutched suddenly at the back of a chair, as though his brain were dizzy and overmastering him. There was Ada's favourite canary in a cage above him, and it greeted the sunlight with a few chirps, and then burst into song. The shrill head-splitting notes rang through the room, and told so much of joy and content, that Martin dragged down the blind again, and cursed the bird in his vehemence for being happier than he. Presently he began to pace the room, and to glance with a something like nervousness at the time-piece on the mantel-shelf. He had always hated waiting for anything ; it disturbed his temper and excited him. Woe to the customers at his warehouse if they were ten minutes behind their appointment, and ignominious dismissal to his

servants who hampered his movements by delay. And now to wait for an answer to his life, and the gilt pendulum of that accursed time-piece swinging so monotonously to and fro, and the hands upon the dial never moving on! To wait an age in his mind, and then find a minute—perhaps two if he had been patient—scored against time in his favour. He thought he would plant himself upon the hearth-rug, where Ada had drawn herself up haughtily beneath his charge, and look the slow-going devil in the face!

So the minutes of that long hour dragged away, and the pendulum swung to and fro like the scythe of the enemy, mowing down with every second some one's hopes, and taking away land or money, a little child, a last chance, a father, mother, wife, and leaving the vacuity of Fate to the bereaved. Martin would not have lighter thoughts, or look at more than one

side ; his gloomy, distorted mind would see with every minute but the misfortunes that befall his fellows, and not the little diamond drops of joy which here and there fall on fair wishes and brighten up a home.

And Ada. In the solitude of her chamber did she weep and pray, and think, and wonder when the hour would go by ? Was she struggling with her resolution to be firm, and praying for strength to obey ?

No. The white face might imply a despair of ever being happy, a consciousness of a life before her being nothing but a trial and a mockery, but she could not so forget her womanhood as to take his hand in friendship, and acknowledge his suspicions had been just. He had broken *his* marriage vow—for he had sworn to love and honour her, and what love or honour was there in seeking with a breath to sully her fair fame ? He had shown his trust in her by

being the first, instead of the last, to impute the basest motives to her; and his answer to her indignant refutation of the charge was an hour to consider whether she should tacitly acknowledge he was right.

For it was an acknowledgment of her errors to turn from the church wherein she had worshipped, and to treat with contumely a good man, whose only fault was not that of the church in general—too much zeal in its cause. No, no, she must not give way, though not to relent was to sunder them and begin a life, as he said, worse apart than together. Suspicion and eternal misery must follow her wavering; for after that assent every action would be jealously watched, and distrust would only gather strength, not die.

No, she would not purchase the shadow of happiness with an acknowledgment of wrong—her life had been pure and holy,

and had he been a true husband, he would have respected her more.

And so the hour passed away to each; and Ada felt her cheek blanch, and her heart beat, as the heavy tread of Martin was heard at last advancing up the stairs.

A sharp tap at the door, like the summons from the hand of Destiny.

“May I enter?”

“Yes.”

Martin Chester, grave and calm—awfully and unnaturally calm, now!—came into the room, and stood before her. Her heart sank—perhaps inwardly bled—as she gazed into his face, and read therein the will to sacrifice all, rather than yield. He had spoken; it was for her to answer. And for that answer he had come with his grey face into her chamber.

“The hour for reflection—and let me hope repentance—has gone by. Shall it be, or shall it not?”

What might have happened, had he spoken kindly in the first moments of that interview—had he let her know how near she was to his heart, and how he dreaded the result of his own determination! What might have happened, had she flung herself upon his broad chest and wept there—had she asked for his rightful thoughts of her, his mercy to think for both, and his old belief in her undivided love! Ah! what might have happened, had the one word been said; and from what would each have escaped in the misty future they were to share apart? Strange, bewildering mystery of life, to grope amidst the shadows, and be for ever within a hair's-breadth of what might make or mar us—still for ever undreaming of the good or evil from which we have turned!

“Shall it be, or shall it not?”

They were the old stern words, though the fire of an hour ago had vanished, and she fancied the eye was full of the old

suspicion, under which to live was sorrow.

"I cannot say 'it shall be;' for that implies I have been guilty in some word or thought, or act, which justifies you in this cruelty. Better to live asunder, than live in the midst of suspicion."

"Do I speak of suspicion now?"

"You have spoken of it, God knows!" she cried, straining her two hands together.

"I may not speak so, if you trust implicitly in me, and what I believe is for the good of both of us—if you place your hands in mine, and say, 'Martin, with the old love, and in the old confidence, I trust in you again. It shall be!'"

"My fate was in your hands, and you neglected it."

"Where was the confidence, Ada, when — but let the dead rest. I have done with it, and the choice lies before you. *Shall it be?*" he repeated once again.

"IT SHALL NOT!"

Martin's hands dropped to his side; and Ada, with a start, turned to him, and then recoiled from that undecipherable face which nothing now appeared to change. It told nothing of the inner workings of the mind, but was a death-like metallic mask, that had taken its shape from the world, and had for ever hardened against her.

"So be it, madam. It is your answer, gravely deliberated upon, and it is final. Granted the misery it entails, and the hopes it dissipates—still I believe it for the best. The truth is always the best, and to live on with a lie at our hearts is a leprosy that eats into the soul. We have been mistaken in each other, and it is as well to separate before our want of confidence and sympathy incur fresh evils on us."

He paused, as though he even waited for an answer; but Ada's white lips moved not, and her eyes were bent upon the rich carpet of her bridal chamber.

"I have but to propose, for the world's sake—even for your own and mine—that you consider this house your home; and I will make over to you, as soon as it can possibly be accomplished, that legacy of money bequeathed you by your father, and which by marriage became mine. Any further annual sum which you may consider necessary to support you as a lady of position I will place at your disposal."

Ada remained silent. It was as if her last words had been spoken to him, and had made them, from that time forth, strangers for ever.

"The world, ever busy with people's good names, need not know of our separation," he continued, in the same hard tones; "my time will be spent at the warehouse—I shall live there entirely—and only a few will wonder why we are so seldom together. Let it even be necessary to explain to the curious that *religious differences* have parted us—why, that

is to a certain extent praiseworthy, and shows that affection has not deadened the conscience."

"Are you anxious, for my sake or your own, that the world should talk not of us?" asked Ada, suddenly.

"For both," he replied; and then, after another painful pause, "has Mrs. Chester any further questions to ask?"

Ada made an effort to speak, then shook her head. He turned towards the door, and stood there looking back. Was it his guardian angel whispering to him that changed for one brief moment the expression of his face, and made him raise a hand to his side as if in pain? It might have been, but he stood there till the stern lines deepened again, and the lips once more tightened together. Yet some involuntary impulse took him back—but oh! not with the look that might have shattered the iron barrier rising up between them.

He took her hands in his—stooped, and coldly kissed her forehead.

“For the last time in life, Ada, together. God forgive us both our short unhappy marriage—we have need to ask it, erring mortals that we are. And now,” releasing her hands, “for ever apart—for ever apart!”

He went out of the room with a quick step, and closed the door upon the wife he had abjured; he strode rapidly downstairs, went to a writing-desk in his room, and took therefrom a little case, which he thrust in his pocket; he passed with the same dull look and inflexible face to the scene of their last quarrel, and hunted about the room for a half-finished purse of knitted work, which he found at last, and placed also in his pocket; then he stood for a moment with a finger on his lip, thinking. A pamphlet on the table caught his eye at this moment; he crossed the room towards it, and read on the title-page the name of the Reverend

Geoffrey Stone, curate of St. Jude's. Having slowly torn that pamphlet to pieces, and scattered it on the carpet, he looked at his portrait hanging smilingly before him, and a sudden impulse made him, with a quick movement of his hand, turn its face to the wall.

"So let the story end," he muttered; "it is the *finis* to a satire on man's hopes of wedded bliss."

Into the hall, where he pulled his hat over his brows, and buttoned his coat to the chin, as though he were expecting a hail-storm to receive him without; then he opened the door and closed it softly behind him.

Not so softly but that the quick ears of the wife above-stairs heard the light click of the lock, and in the impulse of the moment Ada drew the blind from the window that looked upon the drive and the broad carriage-road running past the house.

Yes, there he was going his way in life,

setting out from that day on a pilgrimage, the end of which was wisely, mercifully hidden.

He turned not his eyes from the road at his feet, but went steadily onwards, heedless of the pale, affrighted face watching him behind the curtain ; ignorant—as he was for ever ignorant—of the figure of the loved sinking to the ground, and moaning out his own sad words—

“For ever apart !”

END OF VOL. I.

